

# WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

*Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Application made for Second-Class Entry at N. Y. Post-Office.*

No. 36.

NEW YORK, JUNE 26, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

## YOUNG WILD WEST'S MILLION IN GOLD!

### OR, THE BOSS BOY OF BOULDER.

*By AN OLD SCOUT.*



"Here's the nugget that puts the finishing touch to the million," said Wild, holding out the lump in one hand and grasping Arietta's hand with the other. "Here's the girl who picked it up, boys!"



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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE DYING MINER'S LEGACY.

In one of the most picturesque parts of Northern Colorado one day in early summer a few years ago a party of six might have been seen riding on horseback.

To many these people might have looked out of place in that wild, mountainous region, where the snow-capped mountains reared themselves on every hand and the weird and angular rocks of gray and brown studded the sides of the gorges that broke their irregular way through the vast beds of earth and rock and wound in a snake-like fashion for miles and miles, in many instances where the foot of the white man had never trod.

The fact of the party being made up of three males and three females would seem that those who composed it possessed no little courage and daring, otherwise they would not have attempted such a journey.

They were riding along at an easy gait, two abreast, and the costumes they wore being typical of the Wild West, they made a striking, not to say dashing appearance.

The two in the lead were a boy and a girl. We say a boy and a girl because the former was not more than twenty, if he was that, and his fair companion had not yet reached the age of eighteen.

They were no less personages than Young Wild West and his pretty sweetheart, Arietta Murdock, a couple who had experienced more of the dangers and thrilling escapes from

Indians and renegades than has ever fallen to the lot of any boy or girl who was born and bred in the Wild West.

Behind them rode Jim Dart, a youth of about Wild's age, who was a chum and partner of his, and his sweetheart, Eloise Gardner, a girl of the brunette type and rather delicate in looks, though beautiful, withal.

Next came Cheyenne Charlie, the famous scout and Indian fighter, who had served the Government well and faithfully for several years before he joined Young Wild West in an expedition to the Black Hills a year or so before and made a rich strike in the gold bearing district. His wife, Anna, a handsome and stately young woman, rode at his side, ever and anon casting glances of admiration at the tall, bearded man beside her, who rode his horse with such ease and grace that he almost seemed to be a part of the animal.

But if Cheyenne Charlie rode in a graceful manner what could be said of Young Wild West!

There are many men and boys of the West who have spent much of their time in the saddle, and who have become so accustomed to it that it would seem that they could become no more perfect in the art—for art it surely is—but when Young Wild West came dashing up on his spirited sorrel Spitfire those who thought they had attained the acme of equestrianism would, if they spoke truthfully, be likely to say that they had yet something to learn about riding.

Strong, well-built, fearless and brave, even unto recklessness, Young Wild West, with his finely-moulded features, dark eyes and flowing chestnut hair, showed up for



what he was, every inch of him a perfect specimen of a youth of the border.

His sweetheart was a blonde, and as the couple rode slowly along the mountain trail that now wound its way close to the edge of a yawning chasm, she made a charming picture.

"Oh! Wild," she said suddenly. "Look what a lovely flower!"

She pointed up at the bank of earth a rock that slanted toward a ridge high above them.

All hands turned their eyes in the direction indicated by Arietta and they saw a bunch of wild flowers such as grow in the mountains of that climate.

But there was one particular flower that projected out from all the rest, and it was so beautiful in appearance that it was not strange that the attention of the girl had been attracted to it.

"Oh!" exclaimed Anna and Eloise Gardner as their gaze settled on the flower.

"Very fine, ain't it?" Cheyenne Charlie queried. "I s'pose ther next thing Arietta will want Wild to climb up there and get it."

"Whoa!" said Young Wild West suddenly, and as he brought his horse to a halt the rest followed his example. "Do you want that pretty flower, Et?"

"Of course, I would like to have it," was the reply. "But what is the use of talking? You, nor nobody else could climb up there and get it."

"Never mind about that. Just move your horse over there and hold your hat."

Arietta understood at once.

She very quickly urged her horse to the spot her lover pointed out, and then taking off the jaunty, broad-brimmed hat she wore, she held it ready to catch the pretty flower.

Then Young Wild West drew his revolver.

Crack!

The flower came tumbling down like a stricken bird and Arietta very deftly caught it in her hat.

"What won't you be shooting at next, Wild?" Jim Dart asked, looking at his chum in amazement, for the bullet had cut the stem about five inches from the flower, making it a remarkable shot indeed.

"Oh! it just struck me all of a sudden, and I thought I would bring it down," was the retort. "If I hadn't hit it the first time I would have kept on till I did. I guess either you or Charlie could do the same thing if you tried."

"Not ther first time," said the scout, shaking his head. "I doubt if I could bring one of ther flowers down if I shot in ther whole bunch. I'm goin' to try it, though, for Arietta mustn't be ther only gal to wear a flower pinned on her bosom."

At that Charlie raised his revolver and fired.

Much to his satisfaction, three or four of the largest of the wild flowers came down.

Dismounting he picked them up and gave the two best ones to his wife and Eloise.

He had just got into the saddle again when the crack

of a pistol came to their ears from some point farther along the trail.

Instantly the six were all attention.

"Ride slowly," said Wild. "I will go on ahead and see what the trouble is."

A word to the sorrel and he was off like a shot.

Young Wild West had not covered more than fifty yards when his quick ears caught the faint sound of a cry for help.

Then his gaze suddenly lighted on a horse standing by the wayside.

Wild promptly came to a halt.

"Hello, there!" he called out.

"Hello!" came the faint reply from a clump of bushes. "Thank God! Some one's comin' afore I pass in my chips. Come here, stranger."

Though he held his revolver in his hand, ready for instant use, Young Wild West did not for a moment think there was any deception in the voice that spoke to him.

He rode on a few yards, and then dismounting, boldly approached the clump of bushes.

The horse gave a whinny at sight of the sorrel, but did not offer to leave the spot.

Then Wild saw that the steed was standing over a man who lay wounded on the ground.

By his appearance the man was a miner, and the gray color that had settled upon his face showed quite plainly that he had not long to live.

"What is the matter, stranger?" asked Young Wild West, as he knelt beside him.

"Youngster, I'm done for!" was the gasping retort. "Have yer got some liquor about yer?"

"Wait a minute. I haven't, but there is a fellow with me who has."

Then Wild rose to his feet and called to his companions to come on.

The next minute they were on the spot and Charlie was at the wounded miner's side, pouring something from a flask down his throat.

"Thankee!" exclaimed the man in a stronger voice. "Now, I feel better. Where be you people goin' to?"

"We are going to Boulder," answered Young Wild West.

"That's jest where I come from. I got done for three miles back on ther trail, an' here's as far as I could git. I'm fast cashin' in, strangers. I'm fast cashin' in."

"Who shot you?" asked Jim Dart.

"A feller named Bruce Budd. Him an' his gang has been houndin' me for more'n a month 'cause I wouldn't tell 'em where ther richest lode in Boulder County was. I found ther lode, an' I made a fortune out of it. I saved enough to go East an' settle down an' live without work in my old days, an' then I lit out of ther place this mornin' bound not to tell any one where ther lode is. Give me some more of that whiskey, will yer?"

Young Wild West had been endeavoring to stay the flow of blood from a wound in the miner's right breast, and he now held his handkerchief to the spot and lifted his head so he could swallow the stimulant.



"I ain't got a relative in ther whole world," resumed the dying man, his cheeks flushing from the effects of the liquor. "You people come along in time to ease me while I'm passin' in, so I'm goin' to tell you where ther lode is. There's millions in it! You kin all be rich—that is, if Bruce Budd don't put an end to yer afore you dig it out. Take my belt when I'm gone an' rip ther buckskin off what's sewed along ther back of it on ther inside, an' you'll find a chart of ther place, an' ther way to git to it. It ain't drawn very neat, but it's plain as day. I don't know who you are, but I kin tell an honest face when I see it, an' that's what all of yer have got. Ther gold ain't no good to me, so git it, if yer kin; it's yours. But look out fer Bruce Budd."

Here the man was attacked with a fit of coughing, and our friends surely thought it was all over with him.

But he rallied again a moment later and called for the bottle again.

When Cheyenne Charlie had poured a few drops down his throat, the miner fixed his eyes on the face of Wild for a second, and then, in a hoarse whisper, said:

"Young feller, I wish you would drop that feller, Bruce Budd. I think I'll rest easier in my grave when he goes under. If ever there was a smooth-tongued villain, he's one! But look out for him! He's like a snake in ther grass. I—I—well, ther lode is—is yours, 'cause I ain't got——"

That was all he said.

Like the snuff of a candle his life went out, and our six friends were in the presence of Death.

For a moment no one spoke a word.

The girls had turned away, and they now dismounted and stood where they could not see the corpse.

"Boys," said Young Wild West, "we must bury this poor fellow. Then we will take his belt, as he requested us, and go on to Boulder. We started out for a trip through Northern Colorado in search of pleasure and adventure, and incidentally for the benefit Eloise might derive from the pure air. Now, we have run across our first real adventure, and there is no telling where it will end, as I propose to hunt up this wonderful lode he spoke about, and if this Bruce Budd attempts to bother us, he will get what the poor miner wanted him to get—a bullet."

Charlie had thrown his handkerchief over the dead man's face, and at a sign from Wild, he unbuckled the belt and handed it over.

A revolver lay on the ground, and when they examined it they found that the chambers were empty.

"Ther poor feller fired his last shot to attract ther attention of somebody, an' we happened to be near enough to hear it," observed Cheyenne Charlie, solemnly.

"Yes; and he, no doubt, died easier than he would have done had he been alone," spoke up Jim Dart.

"Well, boys, there is only one thing we can do now," said Young Wild West. "Get at work and dig a grave."

they had not the proper tools to work with, they had a grave dug at the end of twenty minutes.

Then they tenderly laid the body in its last resting place, and when they had stood in silence for the space of a minute with bared heads, they proceeded to cover it over.

They did not go through the pockets of the clothing at all. The man had bequeathed his belt to them, saying nothing about anything else, and they were not the ones to take more than that from him after he was dead.

If he had wanted to give them more he would surely have mentioned it.

When a little mound had been made to mark the spot the girls dropped the flowers that had been shot from the high bank for them upon the grave, and then mounting their horses, they rode from the spot.

"From what the poor fellow said, we cannot be at a very great distance from the place where the lode is situated," said Wild. "He stated that it was three miles back where he had received his death wound at the hands of Bruce Budd, and I suppose he was not followed many miles before the cowardly shot was fired. We must be on the lookout as we proceed, now, for such a villain as he described, might suddenly attack us with a big gang of ruffians at his back.

But a lookout was not needed, it seemed, for when they had covered about seven miles, without meeting a human being, they suddenly came in sight of a hustling mining town that nestled in a little valley.

They had brought the horse of the dead man with them, and Wild knew that the steed would surely attract the attention of the coward who had murdered the man, if he was in the town.

There were not more than forty shanty buildings in the place, and of these half a dozen had signs up as being hotels.

Our friends headed for the most pretentious looking of the latter, as it was near noon, and they felt as though they would like to enjoy a meal that was prepared in a house.

They had been forced to camp and cook their own meals for the last two days, and it would be a change.

As they dismounted in front of the hotel half a dozen men came out.

One of them, a red-whiskered fellow of sinister appearance, gave a violent start when he saw the horse they had brought into town with them.

"Where'd ye come across that hoss, strangers?" he asked, a moment later.

"Are you Bruce Budd?" exclaimed Young Wild West, looking at him sharply.

## CHAPTER II.

### WHAT THE CHART TOLD THEM.

The red-whiskered man was greatly surprised when



He stepped back a pace, and then placing his hand on the butt of his revolver, exclaimed:

"What do you want to know who I am fur, youngster?"

"Well, you see, Bruce Budd shot and killed a man a few miles back on the trail, and I told the poor fellow before he died that I would look out for you and see that you got what was coming to you. Again I ask you, are you Bruce Budd?"

"That are my name, youngster," was the rather slow reply, as though the man was studying what to say. "I'm Bruce Budd, jest as sure as you are an impudent, rattle-brained youngster. If it was a man what said I had shot an' killed a man this mornin' he wouldn't live ten seconds after he'd said it, 'cause it's a lie!"

He drew his revolver slowly from the holster as he said this, and held it as though he was trying to frighten the boy.

Wild smiled at this, and then in a perfectly cool tone, retorted:

"Mr. Bruce Budd, if it was a man who insinuated that I told a lie, I would be apt to hurt him!"

A hoarse murmur of astonishment went up from the men on the hotel porch.

The majority of them knew Bruce Budd, and they were aware that he was one of the most reckless men in that section.

They had never seen Young Wild West before, and they took him to be a nervy young fellow who had made the mistake of his life in talking to Bruce Budd as he had done.

They expected to see him fall to the ground with a bullet in him in no time.

"I reckon I'll have to shoot one of yer ears off, jest to learn you a lesson," said the red-whiskered man, coolly.

"And I reckon you will drop that shooter!"

These words rang out sharply, and then every one saw that the boy had his man covered.

"Drop that shooter, I say!" commanded Young Wild West. "Drop it, or I'll bore a hole through your carcass!"

Bruce Budd's jaw dropped, and then his fingers released their grasp upon the revolver, and it fell to the ground.

"I guess you are not so dangerous as you tried to make out," observed Wild, in his easy, matter-of-fact way. "Now, I want to tell you something. That horse there was the property of the man you shot this morning. Don't you dare to deny that you shot him, for if you do I will drop you as I would a mad prairie dog! I don't know the name of the poor fellow, but he left town this morning, because you and your gang were harassing him all the while, and just for spite you shot him as he was leaving. Gentlemen, that man is a cowardly murderer! Perhaps some of you know the name of the man who left town this morning?"

"It was Jim Mitchell," spoke up a miner, standing in

"Well, then, Bruce Budd shot him, for Jim Mitchell told us so with his dying breath."

The face of the villain turned all colors while our hero was talking.

He began edging away toward a roan horse that was tied to a tree, and as none of the men standing around made a move to stop him, Wild let him go.

"Go on, Bruce Budd!" he called out to him. "But just mind your eye when you come around here again. There is a rope waiting for your neck, and just as sure as you are sneaking away there, you will get it before many days!"

The man had reached his horse now, and as he was in the act of mounting he turned and looked straight at the handsome young Prince of the Saddle.

"You've got all ther best of it this time, young feller," he said. "You got ther drop on me, fair an' square, an' there was no use in me tryin' to do anythin', or tryin' to prove my innercence. Now, before I go I would like to ask what is your name?"

"Young Wild West is my name," replied Wild. "I hope it will do you good, now that you have learned it."

"All right, Young Wild West, we'll meet ag'in afore many hours, an' when we do meet I'm goin' to prove that you're a liar, if you say I shot Jim Mitchell this mornin'. Good day!"

The villain mounted his horse with surprising quickness, and the next instant he was galloping away.

The girls had not yet dismounted, and their escorts now turned their attention to them and assisted them to alight on the ground.

"Can we get dinner here, sir?" Wild asked, addressing a man who was in his shirt sleeves and wore no hat.

"Yes, sir!" was the prompt reply. "Step right in. Do you want your horses cared for, too?"

"Well, yes; they should have a good rubbing down, and when they are cool enough some oats won't hurt them."

"All right, Mr. West. I'll guarantee you good service at ther Nugget House."

Two men quickly took charge of the horses—the one that had belonged to the murdered miner, also—and then our friends went into the reception-room of the hotel.

In something like half an hour they were ushered into the dining-room, where they sat down to a meal that was much to their liking, since it was well gotten up and was served neatly.

Wild found that the hotel proprietor's name was Lynch, and after dinner he had quite a talk with him.

He found the man to be one of the right sort, according to his judgment, and the result was that he engaged board for himself and companions for a week.

The name of the town, or "camp," as it was called by most of the inhabitants, was North Boulder.

It was really a part of Boulder, though some three miles intervened between the two places.

When Wild, Charlie and Jim came into the barroom of



of attraction among the men who had gathered there, more especially Wild.

Those who had seen him tame Bruce Budd had told the others, and as Budd was known as such a bad man in that section, they were anxious to see the boy who had shown him a trick he did not know.

One of the men had heard of Young Wild West, and he was more anxious than any of the rest to see him and shake hands with him.

So when our hero came into the barroom, this man, who went by the name of the "Shadow," because he was so tall and slim, pushed his way toward him, and exclaimed:

"Young Wild West, I've heard a whole lot about you. Will yer let me grip your paw once?"

"Certainly," was the reply. "With whom have I the honor of shaking hands, if I may ask?"

"I'm ther Shadder—that's all ther name I goes by."

"Ah! I see. Have you lived around here long?"

"I was one of the fust men to locate here."

"Then you knew Jim Mitchell?"

"Oh, yes! I knowed him as well as any one. You see, Jim was a feller what never got very thinck with anybody. They do say that he struck an awful rich lode while prospectin' one day, arter he'd only been out here a few weeks, an' since that time he acted as though he didn't want to mix with any of us."

"I see. Well, he passed in his chips this morning. We happened along just as the breath was leaving him. He told us that Bruce Budd had followed him out of town and shot him."

"Well, I reckon Bruce Budd wouldn't be any too good to do it," and the man looked around to see who heard him make the remark.

He must have been satisfied that none of the villain's friends were there, for he went on:

"Jim Mitchell was hangin' around ther big town over here, which is Boulder, yer know, for ther past week or two. I don't know whether he left ther town this mornin', or not."

"He did leave it, and he left the world soon after from the effects of a bullet fired by an assassin."

"An' he said Bruce Budd was ther one what done it?"

"Yes."

"Well, you kin gamble that it is so, then, for Jim Mitchell wasn't ther man to tell a lie at any time, let alone when he was dyin'. Are yer goin' to make Budd swing for it?"

"I promised his dying victim to look out for him."

"An' you will, too, I s'pose?"

"Yes; in both ways."

"Well, he are a dangerous man. They do say that it was ther first time he was made to drop his shooter when you got ther drop on him, this noon."

"That might be. But I have got the drop on much swifter scoundrels than he is, I am quite sure. He started in to pick a row the moment we rode up. We had Mitch-

came across the horse. Then I asked him if he was Bruce Budd, and the trouble started."

"I see. Well, if you an' your friends need any one to give you a lift while you are around these diggin's jest call on me. You'll find I ain't ther worst kind of a feller, if I do say it myself."

"Thank you, Mr.——"

"No mister about it. Jest plain Shadder. That's my name, an' it's good enough."

"All right. Thank you, Shadow."

"I don't need any thinkin', but I want to tell you that I am awful glad you have come here, for it sorter strikes me that you might do some good in these parts. Things ain't goin' on jest as they ought to go. There's too many men been robbed lately to make it a payin' business to dig out nuggets an' dust. Now you've got it, an' ther next minute you ain't."

"Well, I did not intend to stop very long here, but I think we will put a week in, anyhow. We were taking a little trip over the mountains more for the benefit of the delicate young lady we have with us than anything else. The air of these parts is good for weak lungs, and as the young lady is engaged to be married to a chum of mine, I am anxious to see her recover her health."

"Keep her out of doors a good deal, an' make her rough it a little. That will do her more good than anything else. Why, do you know one thing! When I come here I was twenty pounds lighter than I am now, an' I expected I was goin' to die afore I got here. But I've picked right up, an' though I'm still a shadder, I don't feel an ache or pain."

"Well, it don't seem possible that you were ever that much lighter in weight," and Wild smiled, for the man was certainly very thin.

"But I was, though, as anybody who was here when I landed here from Michigan kin tell yer. You take my advice, an' make this gal you was talkin' about rough it a little in ther open air. It will do her no end of good."

Our hero thought the advice good, and he meant to see that it was acted upon.

After they had got pretty well acquainted with the men around the hotel, our friends retired to a private apartment, and then Wild brought out the belt Charlie had taken from the dead man.

With the point of his knife he ripped the stitches from the strip of buckskin that was sewed to it, and a long, folded paper was disclosed.

But that was not all, either!

Under the paper, folded lengthwise, were five one thousand-dollar bills.

"Gee!" cried Charlie, "ther poor feller was putty well fixed, too!"

"It is a shame that he had to be killed just as he had made up his mind to leave the place," spoke up Arietta. "That money would have started him in business somewhere, and he could have lived in comfort the rest of his days."



tell us that he had no relatives, so I suppose the money belongs to us, as he gave us the belt."

"We don't need it," remarked Jim.

"Well, we won't give it to Bruce Budd, that is certain."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed all hands in a breath.

"Well, the poor fellow must certainly have told the truth when he said he had no relatives that he knew of. That being the case, we are in duty bound to take the money. But I tell you what we will do with it. We will use it to build a church in Weston. That is about the best use I think we can put it to."

"Good!"

"We will ride over to Boulder this afternoon and deposit it in the bank, so it will be safe."

"That's it."

"That being settled, we will now look at the paper here. That seemed to be of more worth to the dying man than anything else, since he spoke of the chart, and not the money."

Young Wild West carefully unfolded the paper.

It was a sheet of what is called legal cap, and when it had been smoothed out on the table before the six, they saw that it contained a rather roughly drawn chart.

But Wild soon was able to make it out as plainly as though it had been a map of the town in which he lived.

Both Boulder, and the mining camp called North Boulder, were marked down plainly.

Two lines which ran toward each other until they composed a pyramid started from each of the places, and ended at a place that was marked "Deep gully; nine feet to the right of where the brook flows underground is a big black rock. A crowbar will move this from mouth of cave. Rich vein of virgin gold here."

Then followed a minute description of how to get to the place, but our friends had already seen enough to convince them that they could find the spot without looking at the chart again.

"Whew!" exclaimed Young Wild West, when they had carefully gone over it. "I guess we have struck a streak of luck! It seems that we are going to have something more than a good time traveling over the mountains of Colorado. Here we are right in the most healthful part of the State, where Eloise can get the pure air, while the rest of us dig out a million in gold!"

"No so much as a million, I guess," laughed the boy's sweetheart.

"I don't know about that," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "I wouldn't be surprised if there was more than a million there. It seems to me that accordin' to ther dyin' feller's story an' this chart, there ought to be no end of gold there in that cave. When are you goin' to hunt this place up, Wild?"

"We will start out to-morrow morning," was the reply.

"We won't be long in finding it, since it is not over four

The private room in which our friends had gathered to open the belt overlooked the rear yard of the hotel.

There was a single window there, and as Young Wild West folded the paper and placed it in the flat wallet he carried in an inner pocket of his silk shirt, he suddenly caught sight of a moving shadow outside.

Instantly he was at the window and peering out.

He was just in time to catch sight of a rapidly disappearing man.

"Some one has been spying on us," he said. "I'll see who he was."

Out of the window he sprang, and revolver in hand, he made in the direction he had last seen the form.

Charlie and Jim followed him, but search as they might, they could not see a sign of a human being.

Nor could they hear the sounds of footsteps in any direction.

"That is rather mysterious," observed our hero, when they entered the house again. "But I don't know as it matters much. That rich lode of gold belongs to us, and that settles it. We will stake out a claim there, and then I would like to see the gang that will be able to drive us out!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### BRUCE BUDD AND HIS GANG.

When Bruce Budd rode away from the hotel at North Boulder he was one of the most discomfited men that had ever turned his face from the spot.

Brutal by nature he had developed a reckless, dominating spirit that had carried him through all sorts of stages, and he had at length become what he thought was invincible in the art of bossing those of his fellow men who chanced to disagree with him.

And then just as he was about to teach what he called an upstart of a boy a lesson, to be brought down from his pinnacle before a whole crowd was humiliating, not to say maddening, to him.

But one thing about the man, he could hold his temper in check.

He managed to do this when he found he was but as a mouse is to a cat in the boy's hands, and he made the best of it and got away as soon as possible.

But at every step his horse took he was breathing vengeance on Young Wild West.

"I'll fix this Young Wild West," he muttered for the hundredth time, as he rode into the town of Boulder and reined in his horse before a low drinking and gambling resort. "I'll fix him, or my name ain't Bruce Budd."

The place he had pulled up at was one of many of its kind in the rapidly growing mining town, only that it was much more vile than any of the rest.

Dark stories were told about the "Cloven Roof," which was the name the saloon went by.

If the stories were in any way correct, more than one



Budd had no sooner dismounted when a man came and took his horse and led it to the rear of the place where the stable was located.

The villain walked in with the air of one who held the controlling interest in things in general, and when he stepped up to the bar he was greeted warmly by the half a dozen men in the room.

"Hello, Bruce! What are yer lookin' so glum about?" said the brutal-looking man behind the bar.

"I ain't lookin' mad, am I?" was the reply. "Give me some fluid lightning, an' be quick about it, Bob!"

Bob hastened to put out a bottle and glass, and after he had swallowed a quantity of the fiery stuff Bud turned to the men and asked them to have a drink.

They seemed to be waiting for just such an invitation, for with one accord they stepped up to the bar and partook of the contents of the bottle.

Budd also drank, making it two to their one.

Then he wiped his mouth and looked at the men for a moment, glancing at each one separately.

The result was that one by one, they left the bar, going into a hallway and then down a flight of stairs to the cellar.

When they were all out but the man behind the bar, Budd followed them.

The cellar beneath the saloon was a remarkably dry one, and had a high ceiling.

It was entirely devoid of windows, and two doors had to be opened before it could be entered.

The first was a common door, such as would be apt to be there, but the second, which was only a foot from it, was of heavy oak, and had an old-fashioned brass knocker attached to it.

Bruce Budd did not have to knock for admittance, though, for the two doors were ajar as he came down the stairs, and one of the men who had preceded him stood there to admit him.

When he got inside he found the cellar lighted by a hanging oil-lamp, which, though it made light enough in the center, cast gloomy shadows in the corners.

Around the room was a single row of benches, and in the center beneath the lamp was a table with a chair before it.

"Close the door!" exclaimed Budd, taking a seat in the chair and removing his hat.

The command was obeyed immediately.

"Men," observed the villain, "I have some news."

"What is it, Cap?" inquired one of them.

"Jim Mitchell did not get away from us this morning, after all."

The men looked surprised.

"He dropped soon after I give him that last bullet, and before he died a party of three fellers an' three females come along, an' he told 'em who shot him, an' I guess, what fur."

At this the men looked at each other, and shrugged their shoulders.

"Did you see ther people what he told it to, Cap?" asked one of them.

"Yes; I was on ther stoop of ther Nugget Hotel when they come up, with Mitchell's horse with 'em. What do yer think happened then, boys?"

"What?" came from them all at once.

"I started to pick a row with ther leader of this crowd, an' though he was only a boy, he got ther best of me an' made me drop my shooter."

"What!" and the half a dozen rascally fellows looked aghast.

"That's what he done," went on Budd. "I ain't afraid to own up to it. He is ther quickest feller I ever faced. He told me that his name is Young Wild West, an' he told me that I had better look out for myself, an' all that."

"An' you come on over here?"

"Yes; but Cherry staid over there. He'll know more about these people than I do when he comes over. That Young Wild West told me right to my face that it was me what shot Jim Mitchell, an' when he said it I could see that he was full of grit an' wouldn't hesitate to drop me. He got ther best of me, but now it will come our turn to git ther best of him. It is more than likely that if his crowd found Mitchell as he was dyin' he has told 'em where that wonderful gold mine is. If he has they will certainly hunt it up. Then we will stand a much better show of findin' where it is than we did with Mitchell, 'cause he was only one, an' never went near it any time when we was watchin'. We'll jest lay low till we find it, an' then I'll give Young Wild West what I give Mitchell. That will be my revenge on him."

"But, Cap," observed one of the villains, "if this boy is so soon with his shooter, mightn't it be that he would drop you afore you could fetch him. Such fellers as you say he is ain't likely to be caught nappin', you know."

"I'll take my chances with him, or anybody else, for that matter. You all ought to know what kind of a man I am by this time."

"We do, Cap! There ain't your match in ther world, not when it comes to fightin'!" cried the fellow, who had been in charge of the door.

"You bet!" said the others in unison.

Bruce Budd smiled in a satisfied manner.

He felt that his men were sincere, and that was a thing for him to be proud of.

"Boys," he remarked, a moment later, "we've got to start in to-morrer mornin' an' hunt for Mitchell's gold mine. It must be a dandy lode, 'cause you know when a vein of gold is struck in this vicinity it always are a good one. There's so much silver and copper around here that when you do find gold it is either in very small quantities or else big ones. We've been tryin' to find where Mitchell's mine is for a good while, an' ther fool was so scared that we would find it that he stopped workin' anywhere around it, I s'pose. He'd rather it would go to waste than share it with any one, unless he has told this Young Wild West an' his gang where it was. I think he has, boys. A dyin' "



man is apt to tell sich things as that, you know. Anyhow, we kin tell to-morrer mornin', for if we see ther boy an' his pards lookin' around, you kin bet they will be huntin' for Jim Mitchell's lode!"

"Good!" came from all hands.

"That's what I brought you down here for, boys. They say walls have ears, but we know when we are in ther cellar of ther Cloven Hoof there's no one kin hear what we say unless they are here with us. Now, see ther rest of ther gang an' tell 'em to meet me at ther waterfall to-morrer mornin' at seven."

The villains present promised to do this, and then the meeting, which had been a short one, broke up.

Some of them left the saloon as they went upstairs, and others went into the barroom.

Among the latter was Bruce Budd.

He wanted to have a talk with Bob, the proprietor of the place, who, as might be supposed, was also a member of the gang.

This man, in fact, was the treasurer, and it was he who lured the victims, who chanced to enter the place, to their death, so that they might be easily robbed of the money and valuables they chanced to possess.

The two were soon in a whispered conversation at the end of the bar.

"What is up that you called ther men downstairs?" asked Bob.

"I wanted to tell them to be ready to jine me in huntin' for Jim Mitchell's gold to-morrer mornin'," was the reply.

"Why, have you found a clew as to where it is?"

"Well, **not** exactly. But I shot Mitchell this mornin' as he was leavin' town, an' a little later he died, after tellin' some people he met on ther trail who it was shot him. I reckon he must have told 'em about ther lode, too."

"Tell me all about it," and the saloon-keeper became very much interested.

Budd did so, not omitting what had occurred when he came face to face with Young Wild West.

Bob was very much surprised.

He had known of Bruce Budd's wonderful nerve and reckless daring for a long time, and in that time had never heard of his being humiliated, alone or before a crowd.

And the fact of the desperate man admitting that a boy had got the best of him made is still stranger to him.

Bob scratched his head thoughtfully.

"This youngster must be a wonder," he remarked.

"Mebbe he is," was the retort.

"But you'll fix him, if he crosses you again."

"You kin bet yer boots I will!" and Budd stroked his bushy, red whiskers viciously.

A few minutes later he went into another room and got his dinner.

Then some of the gang came back, and he sat down to play cards with them.

He was waiting anxiously for his man, called Cherry, to come.

This man was his trusted lieutenant, and being a shrewd

fellow, Budd thought he would bring some information concerning Young Wild West when he came.

It was getting well toward the middle of the afternoon when Cherry rode up to the door of the Cloven Hoof, and dismounted.

Bruce Budd knew the man's step when he entered the door, and at once got up from the card table.

Cherry, who was a very small man, weighing scarcely a hundred pounds, at once went out into the hall and descended the steps to the cellar.

He was followed by the captain of the rascally gang of plunderers.

Not until they were in the cellar did the new arrival open his mouth.

Then he said:

"Well, Bruce, I stayed over there long enough to find out somethin'."

"Good! I thought you'd do that, Cherry."

"Yes. My! didn't that youngster show quickness when he told you to drop your shooter?"

"He sartinly did," and Budd shrugged his shoulders, as though the thought of the occurrence was not exactly pleasant to him.

"Well, you done jest what you oughter—you moped. It wouldn't have done for you to have stayed, I'm sartin it wouldn't. That young feller meant business, an' ther tall man an' ther boy with him both acted as though they was jest anxious to see a game of shoot start up. They'd have slayed things if they'd got started, Bruce, I feel sartin that they would."

"Never mind that!" retorted the red-whiskered villain, a trifle peevishly. "What did you find out after I come away?"

"I found out that they know jest where Jim Mitchell's mine is."

"How did you find it out?"

"I listened under ther winder of ther room they was in."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Bully for you, Cherry!"

"Oh! I knows a thing or two, even if I are a little under-size."

"You bet you do."

"My brain is big enough, if my body ain't quite what it oughter be."

"That's right, Cherry."

"An' I never allows a person to be any smarter than I am."

"Right you are," retorted Budd, who was anxious to hear what the man had to say, but felt in duty bound to let him have his own way about telling it.

"I was watchin' ther six of 'em putty near every minute after you got out. I kept kinder out of sight, but I had both my eyes an' ears open."

"Yes; but what did you learn?"

"One thing I come to ther conclusion to right at ther



start was that ther gal with ther golden hair is about ther puttiest I've ever seen, Bruce."

"Yes; but how about Jim Mitchell's mine?"

Budd was getting more impatient every moment.

"That gal is jest my ideal, Bruce," went on Cherry, ignoring the question. "If I knowed of a way to make her fall in love with me I'd give all I own in ther world!"

"You're a fool, Cherry!" exclaimed Budd, in a tone of disgust.

"Mebbe I am, Bruce, "but I ain't ther only one. You don't remember ther gal you fell in love with once, I s'pose?"

"See here! Jest let ther gal business drop for a while. What I want to know is what you found out about Jim Mitchell's mine."

"Well, I'm tryin' to tell yer, but yer won't let me, it seems."

"Yes; I will let you. Go ahead, now. Leave ther gal with ther golden hair till afterwards. She kin wait, I reckon. 'Tain't golden hair what we are after now; it's ther gold itself, an' plenty of it. Now, then, what did you find out?" and the villain brought his fist down upon the table to emphasize his words.

"Well," said Cherry, getting down to business, "I listened under ther winder an' I heard 'em talkin' about openin' a belt that Mitchell had given 'em when he was dyin'. They ripped ther thing open, an' I could hear ther stitches give way when they done it."

"Yes."

"What do yer s'pose they found in ther belt?"

"What?"

"Five one thousand-dollar bills, an' a chart of ther place where there's millions in gold!"

"Get out!" cried Bruce Budd, jumping excitedly from his chair.

"That's jest what they found," declared the little man.

"Oh! if we'd only known that Jim Mitchell had that belt on this mornin'," and Budd began walking excitedly up and down the cellar.

"Yes; if we'd only known it. But we didn't, you see. If we'd only knowed that Mitchell was leavin' Boulder for good, we might have suspected that he had somethin' with him that was worth gittin' hold of; but we didn't, you see."

"Too bad—too bad!"

"Well, Bruce, I'll go ahead with my story. I waited under ther winder long enough to find out that they was goin' to use ther five thousand to put up a church buildin' somewhere, an' that they was comin' over here to deposit ther money in ther bank this afternoon. Then to-morrer mornin' they are goin' to open up ther mine that Jim Mitchell give to them. They know jest where it is, 'cause they've got a chart that's plain as day."

"An' they're goin' to ther place to-morrer mornin'?"

"Yes! that's what they said."

"An' they're goin' to bring over ther five thousand to

"That's as sure as you're born."

"Well, we've got to git ther five thousand first, then."

Cherry shook his head.

"I wouldn't bother with that, at all, Bruce," he said.

"Why wouldn't yer?"

"'Cause if we was to tackle 'em an' git ther five thousand away from 'em, we might lose all chance of findin' where ther gold is."

"How would we lose all chance?"

"Well, they might hire a gang of men an' station 'em around so's we couldn't git anywhere near 'em when they got ter workin' ther lode. That would be onc way, an' another way would be that we might have to shoot 'em afore we robbed 'em, an' then we'd never find ther chart, anyhow. 'Tain't likely Young Wild West is fool enough to carry that chart around with him, 'specially when he's ridin' over here. You kin bet yer life he'll hide that where no one but him an' his friends knows where it is."

The leader of the gang thought a moment, and then said:

"Well, mebbe you're right, Cherry. If you hadn't been sich a brainy chap I'd never made yer my lieutenant. I'll do as you say in this case. Still, five thousand dollars is five thousand dollars."

"I know that, Bruce, as well as you do. A million in gold is a million in gold, too."

"That settles it."

"I thought it would, Bruce."

"Yes; you've got ther brains an' I've got ther nerve."

"An' Young Wild West seems to have a good supply of both."

"Well, he won't have neither of them things when I git through with him."

"I reckon not," and the little man nodded as though he thought it a sure thing.

"We will size up these fellers when they come over to ther bank."

"Yes."

"They might be here now, for all we know."

"I wouldn't be surprisd."

The two villains now went upstairs and out into the barroom.

A number of their own gang were there, but there were other miners and residents of the town who had gathered there, too.

The Cloven Hoof was not patronized alone by the gang of a dozen that held forth in the cellar.

All sorts of characters came in.

There were some strangers there now, and Bruce Budd carefully sized them up.

If he thought there was any one there who had a large sum of money, plans would be promptly laid to get it from him.

While he was looking around three more came into the place.

They were Young Wild West, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim



Bruce Budd turned a trifle pale, and showed signs of being uneasy.

With all his boastful talk he was afraid of the dashing boy with the flowing chestnut hair.

## CHAPTER IV.

### OUR FRIENDS AT BOULDER.

It was decided that all of our friends should ride over to Boulder and visit the bank.

They ordered their horses to be brought out, and then telling the landlord that they would be back in time for supper, mounted and rode off.

The distance being only three miles they went along at an easy pace, taking in the beauties of the wild mountain scenery as they went.

Young Wild West took pains to tell them what the man who went by the name of Shadow had told him, and though they laughed, he impressed it on the mind of Eloise that he believed what the thin man said.

"All right," she retorted, with a laugh. "I will do just as you say. I really feel better since we have got in this part of the country."

"Well, Eloise, you never were what any one could call real sick, anyway," spoke up Arietta, who always had a way of saying encouraging things. "You need a little excitement and plenty of outdoor life, as the Shadow said. Look at me! Do you suppose I would be so healthy looking if I had not spent so much of my time out of doors? And look at Anna! When she first came to Weston she was more of a shadow than anything else. Now she will weigh one hundred and fifty pounds, if she weighs an ounce."

"Not quite so heavy as that," laughed Cheyenne Charlie's wife.

"Well, Anna, how far is Et out of the way on the hundred and fifty pounds?" Wild asked.

"Well, I got weighed at the store in Weston two weeks ago, and I only weighed a hundred and forty-eight," was the reply.

This made every one laugh, and before they got to Boulder they agreed to get weighed, just for the fun of it, as the girls said.

Nothing happened on the way over, and they found the bank without having to inquire for it.

The money was soon deposited, and then they headed for a store where candies and other delicacies were offered for sale.

After he had bought more sweets than they could eat in a week Young Wild West asked the young lady behind the counter where they could weigh themselves in town.

"Why, right in the back room," was the reply. "We have a platform scales."

"Good enough!" exclaimed Charlie. "Now, we will see how much Anna has gained since she has been in the mountains of Colorado."

girl clerk had insisted in dusting the scales he told Arietta to step on the platform.

The girl unhesitatingly did so.

"One hundred and thirty-four!" called out Jim, who had dropped on his knees, so he could make out the figures readily.

"That's pretty good, isn't it?" remarked Arietta, as she stepped from the scales. "Now, Wild, you go next."

All right," answered the young dead-shot, and he did so.

"One hundred and forty-nine," said Jim.

"Well, that is about my average. I guess these scales are accurate. Now, Eloise."

Jim's sweetheart stepped up rather timidly, and waited for him to get the balance.

"Ninety-nine!" he said. "Well, that isn't so bad, after all. Your build is slender."

Eloise appeared to be very well satisfied.

"She will do well enough," remarked Wild. "Now, Anna, let's see if you have gained any since you left home."

Anna stepped up and tipped the beam at a hundred and fifty-one.

"She's only gained three pounds," laughed her husband. "Well, that ain't so bad. Now, I'll see what I weigh."

"One hundred and sixty-three," came from Jim, promptly.

Then he got on, while Wild bent down to see the figures.

"You weigh just a hundred and forty-one, Jim," he said. "You and Eloise can pride yourselves on being the lightest couple in the crowd."

It being a very pleasant place in the store, Wild suggested that the girls remain in there for half an hour, while they went around the town a bit.

"All right," said Arietta. "But don't go to getting in any trouble, now. I suppose you are looking for that man who killed the miner?"

"Well, I am, Et. But if I find him I shan't bother him, unless he opens the game. I'll promise you that."

With that the three left the store.

The first public place their eyes lighted upon when they went out was the Cloven Hoof.

It was but a few yards down the street on the opposite side, so they left their horses tied where they were, and walked over.

Though Young Wild West had an idea that Bruce Budd had come to Boulder, he hardly expected to find him in the first saloon they entered.

But there was the villain at the end of the bar.

Wild decided not to have anything to say to him, or even act as though he recognized him, so he simply led the way to the bar and asked for cigars for himself and companions.

But he was keeping a watch on Budd all the time.

He knew the villain must surely be itching to get a chance at him.

But though Budd certainly would liked to have got square with the boy, he was not going to try it just then.



heard one of the strangers address Young Wild West in an insulting way.

The stranger was a cowboy, and he had been drinking quite heavily.

He no sooner set eyes on the boy when he broke into a grin, and catching the fellow who was with him by the arm, said:

"Look at ther young cow-puncher what's jist come out of a bandbox, Dan. I'll bet he's got cologne on his handkerchief!"

"Sh! I wouldn't meddle with him," was the reply.

"Wouldn't meddle with him, hey? Well, I reckon that if I felt in ther notion I'd take him across my knee an' spank him."

Wild heard all this plainly, but he paid not the least attention to the remarks.

He was watching Bruce Budd, and when he saw the look of delight that shone on his face he thought it was just possible that he had put the cowboy up to pick a muss with him.

Cheyenne Charlie never liked to hear his young friend insulted, and turning to Wild, he said, in a low tone:

"Did you hear what that measly coyote said?"

"Yes; I heard him," was the calm rejoinder.

"All right, then. I thought maybe you didn't."

"I heard him well enough, but so long as he does not bother me any more than that I shan't mind him."

Just then the cowboy, who was a big, powerful fellow, put another drink of liquor down his throat, and then, as he wiped his mouth on his sleeve, he turned to our hero, and exclaimed:

"Hello, young feller!"

"Hello!" was the quick reply. "When did they let you out?"

"When did who let me out?" and the cowboy scowled fiercely, striding toward Wild a couple of paces.

"Your keepers."

"My keepers?"

"Yes; your keepers."

"See here, youngster, don't try to be too smart, now. I don't allow any sich whipper-snappers as you to insult me."

"Oh!" cried Wild, affecting surprise. "You don't like to be insulted, then?"

"I guess not!"

"Well, why do you try to insult others, then?"

"I don't."

The man was edging closer all the time, and Wild knew he was going to make a grab for him pretty soon.

"Well, maybe you don't know when you do insult any one. But a little while ago, when you remarked that you bet I had cologne on my handkerchief, you meant to insult me."

"If you say I said that you l——"

That was all he said, just then, for a clenched fist caught him squarely on the mouth and cut the word short.

The blow was straight from the shoulder, too, and when Young Wild West delivered it he meant business.

The big cowboy staggered like a buck stricken with a bullet, and then down he went in a heap to the floor.

"You also told your friend that if you felt in the notion, you would take me across your knee and spank me. How about it—do you feel in the notion?"

A loud laugh went up from those in the room as Wild said this.

Even Bruce Budd was a little amused.

The friend of the cowboy stood with his back against the bar enjoying it as much as any one present.

"Now, Joe, you see what you got for wantin' to be smart, don't you? Do you want me to help you git 'up?'"

"I guess I kin git up," came the reply in a growling voice.

He got up, and then, looking at Young Wild West for a moment, without saying a word, he suddenly darted for him.

Our hero did not hit him this time.

He simply made one of those quick moves of his, and caught him about the body. Up went the fellow's heels, and the next instant he was lying across the boy's knee, his head being held down by Wild's left hand.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

The Young Prince of the Saddle began slapping the cowboy with all his might.

But when he found that he wase wriggling loose he stopped and allowed him to drop to the floor.

At this man, who was as mad as a hornet, reached for one of his revolvers.

"Hey, Joe, quit that!" called out his friend.

But before the words were out of his mouth Wild gave a kick that sent the weapon flying across the room.

"Get up!" he sternly commanded. "Get up and apologize, or I'll fill your carcass with lead!"

Young Wild West now had his revolver leveled at the fellow, and it was surprising to see how quickly he got on his feet.

"I didn't mean what I said, young feller," he said meekly. "Excuse me, won't you?"

"You are excusable," was the reply. "Now, proceed to get the rest of your jag aboard. Forget what happened just now, and don't never bother with another boy as long as you live."

The cowboy had been thoroughly beaten, and swallowing his wrath he smiled a sickly smile and stepped over to the bar by the side of his grinning companion.

"You're what I call ther quickest an' grittiest piece of bone an' muscle that I've sot eyes on in many a day!" observed the friend of the man, stopping the grin on his face and putting out his hand in a friendly way. "Will you shake, pardner?"

"Certainly," answered Wild, and he put out his hand and gave him a grip that made him wince.

"Your hand don't feel like a boy's, I reckon," he went



on. "If you couldn't fool ther best man what ever traveled these here parts, my name ain't Dan Divver!"

"Well," laughed our hero, "I am not traveling around for the purpose of fooling any one. But I am not of the kind who will be imposed upon by anybody. It is all the same to me, whether it is a man who is as big as a house, or whether he is only a dwarf."

As Young Wild West said this, Cherry, the lieutenant of Bruce Budd, suddenly stepped out into view.

The boy had not seen him before, and so, of course, did not mean the remark for his benefit.

The smaller a man is the more "spunk" he will show, it seems, and it was so in this case.

If anything would "rile" Cherry, it was to hear some one cast reflections on his smallness.

He hopped up before Wild, and began waving his hands about like a windmill.

"You think because I'm small you kin pick on me, Young Wild West!" he cried, in a rage. "I want you to take back that insult. I can't help it if I ain't as big as you are."

"My dear sir," retorted Wild, quickly recovering from his surprise at the little man's action. "I assure you that I did not see you when I made that remark. I will certainly apologize."

"Ha! I thought so. It takes a little man like me to tame you down, does it?" and he began to dance wildly about.

Cheyenne Charlie was a man who, though cool in times of danger, sometimes lost his temper, and when Cherry jumped prettly heavily on his foot in his wild antics, the scout reached over, and picking him up bodily, flung him over the bar as though he had been a bundle of old clothes.

"Keep still, you little coyote!" he shouted. "If you come around here ag'in, I'll wipe ther bar with you! Landlord, we're all goin' to drink to ther health of Young Wild West. Set 'em up!"

## CHAPTER V.

### CHERRY MAKES A BREAK TO WIN THE GOLDEN-HAIRED GIRL.

Cherry landed on all fours like a cat, and just what he would have done, if the proprietor of the place had not seized him and carried him into the back room, will never be known.

Bruce Budd followed as quick as a flash, and between the two of them they quieted the little fellow.

They could not have succeeded in doing this if they had not declared again and again that they were certain that Young Wild West had not seen him when he made the remark about the large and small men.

Bob went back to attend to business, and when Cheyenne Charlie had settled for the drinks for all hands, and followed Wild and Jim out of the place, he gave a sigh of relief.

He had been worrying for fear Young Wild West and his partners would begin to shoot in his place.

What had occurred had been fun for the majority of those present, and it is safe to say that they were sorry when our three friends left the place.

Even the cowboy, who had been handled so easily by the young Prince of the Saddle, was in a good humor.

He had forgotten all about what had happened to him since Cherry had been flung over the bar.

Meanwhile, Budd had succeeded in getting his lieutenant to go downstairs to the cellar.

He knew if the little man got out into the barroom he would surely start a row that would most likely end in shooting some one.

"You jest keep cool!" commanded Budd. "Only a little while ago you was advisin' me not to interfere with these people, 'cause it might hurt our chances of findin' where Jim Mitchell's gold mine is, an' now you want to kick up a fuss that might git us shot. S'pose Young Wild West an' them other two fellers took it in their heads to let themselves loose? What would happen? They might go under after a while, but before they did some of our gang would surely turn up their toes. Now, you jest keep still, Cherry!"

"All right," was the muttered reply. "I guess I did lose my head; but yer can't make me believe anything different than that Young Wild West was makin' fun of me 'cause I'm so little."

"An' I'm sure that he didn't see you when he said it. I reckon he ain't ther kind what makes fun of people, anyway. He don't seem to be, to me. He give that cowboy jest what he deserved, 'cause ther cowboy was tryin' to make fun of him. That boy puts me in mind of a horsewhip with a bran new lash on it. He's certainly a schorcher!"

"I'll make him think I'm a good deal bigger than I am afore I git through with him," retorted Cherry, shaking his head, decisively. "I'll jist show him how I kin steal ther love of that golden-haired girl from him."

Budd laughed at this.

"You kin laugh if you want to, but I'm goin' to try an' win that gal."

As the conceited little fellow said this he pulled out a pocket-mirror, and began to look at the reflection of his elfish countenance.

Now, it had happened that once upon a time Cherry had had his fortune told by an Indian squaw on the Creek Reservation, and she had assured him that a golden-haired girl would fall in love with him some day, and that he would surely marry her and live happily ever afterward.

The little man had paid a good price for this prediction, and ever since that time had been waiting for it to come true.

Now, as he sat looking at his reflection in the little glass, he became convinced that the time had about arrived.

True, Arietta Murdock was not the first golden-haired girl he had seen since he had his fortune told, but as he had been unable to bake a favorable impresson on any of



the others, he was resolved to win this time, or lose a leg.

"If you want to win that gal's love," said Bruce Budd, as he turned to leave the cellar, "you ought to tog up a bit, an' buy some sweet soap, tooth brushes an' ther like. If you ain't got enough money to fit yourself out I'll lend you some."

"I've got enough for that," was the retort.

The captain had no sooner gone than Cherry arose to his feet.

"Hang it all," he muttered, "I ain't homely, an' if that fortune of mine is comin' true at all, it is now. I'm goin' to do as Bruce said. Then, by jingo! I'll ride over to North Boulder to-night an' try to git acquainted with ther gal."

A few minutes later Cherry went up the stairs and left the house by the back way.

Then he headed for the street, and was soon pointing toward the only store in town that kept the latest styles in men's furnishings.

"I've got jist a hundred dollars to fit myself out like a dandy from Dandyville!" he said to the clerk. "See what you kin do fur me now."

"You want to be rigged out in the latest style, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Patent-leather shoes, frock coat, white vest, striped pants and high hat?"

"Yes, an' shirt, collar, cuffs an' neck-tie to match."

"All right, sir. I can just about fit you out for a hundred dollars. Step back here, please, and we will proceed with the transformation."

"I don't want to put ther rig on before to-night," spoke up Cherry.

"Oh! Well, you had better come back and let me rig you out. You might make a mistake in getting some of the things on, you know."

"Well, I'll come over about half an hour before I want to go out."

"Very well. I will show you the things now, and you can pay for them, if you want to."

"I reckon I'll pay right now, an' leave it to you. If I find that you cheat me on ther deal I'll come back here an' shoot some button-holes in your waistcoat where there ain't s'posed to be any."

"Oh! you'll be satisfied. I know exactly what you want. You are going to call on a female, I guess?"

"That's right!"

Then both laughed, but for different reasons.

But let us now turn to Young Wild West and his two partners.

They left the Cloven Hoof saloon because our hero thought there was no need of staying there any longer.

Bruce Budd had gone out, or disappeared into some other part of the house; and they had had a little fun, as was usually the case when they went into a new place, or one that they had not been in before.

"Charlie, I guess you were pretty mad when you picked

up that little fellow and fired him over the bar," said Wild, with a laugh, as they headed for the store where they had left the girls.

"I know it," replied the scout. "I was mad when that cowboy began to sling slurs at you, an' I didn't git any better-humored as things kept on goin'. I picked up that little whipper-snapper 'cause I couldn't help it. I never seen a little man yet what didn't have too much to say."

"You are lucky that they took him out of the room so quick," spoke up Jim with a laugh. "He surely would have hurt you if he had got a chance at you."

"Well, he might have been fool enough to shoot, but I don't think he would have hurt me any. I'd have grabbed him afore he could do any damage."

Charlie laughed, too, now, and they all wore smiles when they stepped into the store.

"Something funny has happened, I guess," said Arietta. "Tell us all about it, won't you?"

"Well, it was rather funny," retorted Wild. "Charlie threw a man about the size of a pint of peanuts over a bar, just to show how strong he was."

"And Wild spanked a big cowboy," added Jim. "Oh! We had lots of fun."

"Well, I should say you had!" exclaimed Anna. "What did it all come about?"

"We will tell you all about it as we ride home," answered the scout. "Come on! I believe I'm getting hungry. We want to be back in time for supper, you know."

The girls bade the miss in charge of the store good-by, and then they went out and mounted their horses.

The ride back to the Nugget Hotel was made without mishap.

To the disappointment of Cheyenne Charlie, supper was not ready when they got there.

They would have to wait an hour, so they were informed, as the man who had gone up on the mountain to catch a mess of trout had not yet returned.

"Trout, hey?" muttered the scout, half aloud. "I reckon if they are fried in butter nice an' brown they'll go good. But I didn't know there was any such fishes to be caught in these parts."

"Oh, yes," replied Wild. "Trout are found all over the United States generally. "But in some places they are so scarce that they are seldom seen. If we are to have genuine spotted brook trout for supper, I guess we can afford to wait a little."

"That's what's the matter!" exclaimed Jim.

Charlie went out in front of the hotel, and took a seat on a bench.

In a little while he saw a man coming with a big string of fish.

He came right into the hotel, and as he passed the scout saw that they were trout, sure enough.

Then he began to grow more hungry than ever.

But twenty minutes later, when the odor of the frying fish was wafted to his nostrils, he could stand it no longer, and got up and went inside.



"Great catamounts!" he exclaimed, "I was never so hungry in my life. Don't them fish smell good!"

"Have a little patience," spoke up his wife. "If you will only wait you will have a chance to taste, as well as smell, them. I never saw a man with such an appetite as you have."

"It must be ther air of ther Colorado mountains what does it," he answered, good-naturedly. "But, layin' all jokes aside, if they don't git supper ready pretty soon, I'm goin' over to ther supply store an' git some crackers an' cheese to whet up my appetite."

But Charlie was not kept waiting much longer.

The room they had examined the chart in had been turned over to their sole use for a sitting and dining room, and a few minutes later Mrs. Lynch, the hotel proprietor's wife, came and told them that supper was ready.

Then for the next half hour they sat at the table discussing the events of the day, while they ate the good things that had been placed before them.

After the meal Charlie and the boys lighted cigars, and went out on the side stoop that was reserved for the regular guests.

The girls were not afraid of being contaminated by tobacco smoke, so they followed.

Here they sat until dark, talking over everything but what they had found in the belt the dying man had given them.

They did not want their private business to be known, and as there had been an eavesdropper hanging around that day, they were bound that they would not give another a chance to hear anything concerning the gold mine that was located in the cave.

It was just about dark when Lynch and his wife came out on the stoop.

Both were dressed in their best, a thing that caused our friends to wonder.

"Mr. West," said the hotel-keeper, addressing our hero, "we have a fiddler in the dining-room, who kin call off quadrilles, lancers an' ther nine-pin dances. There's three couples of you, an' me an' my wife will make four, so what do you say if we have a little dance?"

"Well, retorted Wild, "I, for one, am willing. How does it strike the rest of you?" and he looked at his companions smilingly.

"It will jest suit me!" declared the scout, rising to his feet. "Come on, Anna. I ain't much of a dancer, but I reckon there's a little spring in my feet yet."

"Well, I guess we won't decline the invitation," spoke up Jim. "If we did the set could not be made up. Eloise knows more about dancing than I do, though, and I will have to trust to her to take me through."

"She knows more about it than any of us," said Arietta.

"Well, me an' my wife were born in Kentucky, an' we only know how to dance ther way ther young folks used to in them parts," the landlord assured them.

When our friends came to think of it they entered into the spirit of the thing.

They had left Weston for a trip of enjoyment, and why should they not indulge in an old-fashioned dance in the course of it?

So they got up and walked into the public dining-room, which was the biggest apartment in the house.

The big table had been shifted to one end of the room, and there was plenty of space to have the set in.

"I'll call in ther fiddler," said Lynch; "an'—an'——"

"And what?" said Young Wild West.

"Have you folks any objection if ther men look at us dance, so long as they behave themselves?"

"None, whatever," was the reply. "Let them look all they want to. We have danced a quadrille on horseback before more than a thousand people, and I guess we can go through one on foot before all the people you have got out there."

Lynch seemed greatly pleased at this.

The truth of it was that he had taken it on himself to announce that there was going to be an exhibition of dancing at his hotel by Young Wild West and his friends that evening.

He run chances of their agreeing to such a proceeding.

Lynch had an eye for business, and he knew he would take a lot of money in at the bar from the crowd that was sure to assemble as soon as the music struck up.

The fiddler was soon brought in.

He was a typical Westerner, with flowing hair and a grizzled beard.

The end of his nose was so red that he had long been nicknamed the Strawberry, and when the landlord faced him to our friends, and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, this is ther only original Strawberry, ther boss fiddler of Boulder. He kin play more tunes an' drink more fluid lightnin' than any man this side of ther Pacific Slope!" a good-natured laugh was the result.

The old fellow grinned and stood in the center of the room till a barrel was brought in for him to sit upon.

"You see, ladies an' gents," he said apologetically, "a chair ain't high enough for me to do my best work."

When he had finally taken his seat in the corner he gave a couple of scrapes on the old violin he had, and then proceeded to tune up.

A crowd of miners, cowboys, cardsharps and other men who hung around the diggings, now came in, and found seats in the chairs that were placed in a row around the room.

Those who could not get seats contented themselves with standing in the hall and out on the stoop at the windows.

In a few minutes the music struck up, and then, amid much laughter and jollity our friends started in to dance.

Lynch and his wife were really experts at the old-fashioned style of going through the quadrille, and our friends being very well acquainted with the figures and light of foot, showed themselves to the best advantage.

The first dance was finished, and then while Lynch went out to get refreshments for the ladies, our friends sat down.



It was at this juncture that everybody in the room was surprised to see a queer-looking figure step into the room with the quickness of a cat.

The figure was that of an undersized man attired in the height of fashion.

It was Cherry!

He had fitted himself out in great shape and had just arrived at the Nugget Hotel.

And when he found that a dance was in progress, he felt that he could not have come in a better time.

"Hanged if it ain't ther little ninny I chucked over ther bar in Boulder!" Cheyenne Charlie gasped.

"Right you are," said Jim.

"Whew!" whistled Wild. "Look at the patent-leather shoes!"

"An' that plug hat he's got in his hand," added the scout.

But Cherry heard none of these remarks.

He stood in the center of the room, bowing for a moment, and then observing that there was a vacant chair next to Arietta, he stepped nimbly over and sat down upon it.

Then a scream of laughter went up from the girls.

It might have been unlady-like, but they could not help it.

Cherry looked too comical for anything, and the fact of his taking a seat beside the most beautiful girl in the room was too much for Anna and Eloise.

And when they laughed how could Arietta refrain from joining in?

"Miss, kin I dance ther next set with you?" Cherry asked, looking the golden-haired maiden straight in the face.

When she had recovered from another burst of laughter, Arietta put on a serious expression, and replied:

"You will have to ask my escort, sir. Besides, I never saw you before."

"Oh, well," he spoke up in a piping voice, "I guess ther rules of etikett kin be laid aside, especially here in Boulder County. I reckon your young man there won't kick about my dancin' with you. How about it?" and he turned to Wild.

"Why, certainly, I won't kick. Et, dance with him, by all means. You will seldom have a chance to dance with such a distinguished and finely dressed young man, so you had better grasp the opportunity."

"That's right, Et!" piped Cherry, smiling so broadly that his whole face was wreathed.

Arietta looked at Wild in astonishment, but a glance from him told her to go ahead.

He was bent on having a little fun, and he was going to have it at the expense of his sweetheart, it seemed.

The rest caught on to the spirit of the thing and urged her to not refuse the request of the distinguished-looking gentleman.

Finally, Et agreed to become his partner if they would

In this dance there must be an extra gentleman, who is called the nine-pin.

Every time the fiddler calls off the figure for all to "promenade," it is his duty to grab the first girl he can get and march around with her in triumph, leaving her partner to get in the center and act as "nine-pin."

A few minutes later Strawberry, the fiddler, said he was ready, and they got upon the floor.

Arietta, who was tall and queenly looking, towered over her diminutive partner by easily a head.

There surely was fun ahead.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE DANCE IS BROKEN UP.

"Heads forward!" called out Strawberry. "This here's goin' to be a verry fruitful dance, I reckon. I'm ther Strawberry, an' there's a Cherry in ther set. Let yourselves go, now!"

This sally of wit on the part of the fiddler caused a roar of laughter, but Cherry paid no attention to it.

He know something of the dance, and he was thinking of sticking to the golden-haired girl, so no one else would get her from him.

When the heads had tripped back and forth and made their bows, the fiddler called out for the sides to do the same.

Cherry and his fair partner stepped forward and met Jim Dart and Eloise, and when they got back to their places the call of "All hands around!" sounded.

The strains of the "Money-musk" were making the ceiling quiver now, and the comical figure Cherry cut was one that would hardly be forgotten by those who had the pleasure of watching him.

Right in the midst of the "all hands around" the fiddler changed the tune as if by magic, and shouted:

"All promenade!"

Then it was that the dandified little man suddenly found himself standing in the center of the marching couples without a partner.

Wild had very neatly captured Arietta, and Cherry was left out in the cold.

But he took it good-naturedly, and when the next figure came up he remarked that he would not go it alone very long.

"Take your partner," said Wild, with a laugh. "But mind your eye, for the next time you lose her you will find it hard to get her back."

So he changed places with Wild, and then things went on all right until right in the midst of the "right and left all around" part our hero neatly took Arietta as the "All promenade" sounded from the fiddler's lips.

The dance was finished with Cherry still the Nine-pin, and when it broke up there was much laughing done by every one, save the little man who was "makin' a fool of himself," as Cheyenne Charlie put it.



Young Wild West and his sweetheart had scarcely become seated, when he marched over and asked Arietta to take a stroll on the veranda with him.

The girl thought the thing had gone about far enough, and she flatly refused his attentions.

"What, you won't walk with me?" he cried in evident astonishment.

"No; I desire you not to annoy me any further," and she looked at Wild, imploringly.

But our hero simply smiled.

"Do you know one thing, miss?" Cherry piped; "a fortune-teller once told me that I was goin' to marry jist sich a girl as you are. You must take a seat with me over here, then, if you won't go out on ther stoop. I want to talk to you awful bad."

He took hold of her hand as he spoke, and then, seeing that her lover was not going to take her part, Arietta drew back her hand and slapped him in the face.

She had scarcely done this when Cheyenne Charlie, whose ire had been aroused, sprang over and seized the little dandy.

High above his head he lifted the diminutive form, and then, with a "Look out, there!" he hurled him through the window among the crowd on the stoop.

Cherry had scarcely landed when a revolver cracked and a bullet whistled past Charlie's head.

Several of the men belonging to Bruce Budd's gang had followed the little lieutenant over to see the fun, and they were now going to resent the rough treatment he had received.

The instant the revolver shot rang out all was in confusion, both inside and out.

Young Wild West led the way from the room, going through the door and out of the hall.

"Put away your shooters!" he cried, in a ringing voice. "Put them away, I say! The first man who presses a trigger I'll drop!"

This command had a great effect upon the excited throng. Right behind Wild came Charlie and Jim.

The scout was as mad as a hornet, and if he could have got a hold upon the collar of Cherry just then he would have made the heels of his patent-leather shoes rattle.

Suddenly, a tall, thin man took off his hat in the center of the crowd, and yelled out:

"Hooray for Young Wild West, ther Boss Boy of Boulder!"

Then those who had been so anxious to shoot a few seconds before forgot all about it, and the first thing they knew they were cheering along with the rest of the crowd.

The Boss Boy of Boulder!

That became the cry.

Those who had become acquainted with Young Wild West knew that the title fitted him, so they took up the cry and repeated it again and again.

"Thank you, boys," retorted our hero, when the noise had subsided a little. "Did any of you catch sight of the fellow who shot at Cheyenne Charlie?"

No one could say just who it was that did it, but Shadow said that whoever it was had made off the instant he fired the shot.

"And Cherry—where is he?" queried Wild.

"He's moped, too."

"A good thing," muttered Charlie. "Ther next time I git my clutches on ther little fool, I'm goin' to shake him till his teeth fly out."

Just then the sounds of rapid firing came from a point about two hundred yards distant.

Then some yelling rang out on the still night air, followed by more shots.

That was enough for the rough men of the mining camp.

They headed in the direction the noise of the excitement came from, as if by one accord.

And Young Wild West and his partners ran along with them.

Their opinion was that some of the men standing at the front when the fellow had fired the shot into the room had given chase to the ruffian, and that a fight between them was in progress.

This was a conclusion to draw that was quite natural.

Cheyenne Charlie was anxious to catch the man, so he soon forged ahead of the rest, his muscular, long legs giving him an advantage over most of the men of his age.

But Wild and Jim let out a spurt and were soon running at his side.

They soon reached the clump of trees whence the shooting and yelling had come, but when they came to a halt they could neither see nor hear anything.

Then the crowd began making a search of the place.

Young Wild West thought they would surely find a dead man, if no live ones.

But a search of ten minutes revealed nothing.

"It's mighty curious, ain't it?" observed Shadow, walking up to Wild, and shaking his head in a puzzled way.

"It is rather strange," was the reply.

"What do you s'pose they could have done that shootin' an' yellin' fur?"

"Well, it must have been a fight of some kind."

"Yes; but where have they gone?"

"They must have scattered mighty quick. I could have sworn that there was as many as half a dozen makin' all that noise."

"Where were you when Cherry was tossed out of the window, Shadow?" Young Wild West asked.

"I was standin' about a dozen feet away," was the answer.

"Were there any of his friends around there?"

"Well, come to think of it, there was some fellers what I've often seen him with. He hangs out over in Boulder City most of ther time, you know."

"Bruce Budd wasn't there, was he?"

"No; I didn't see him, but some of his gang was there, though. Them's ther ones I meant when I spoke of Cherry's friends. They all go together, you know."

"Well, let us get back to the hotel."



peculiar affair, I think. I am puzzled to know what it all means."

"So am I."

"An' I know I am," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie."

"It strikes me now that this Cherry, as they call him, came in that room for a purpose to-night," said Jim Dart, suddenly.

"What do you mean?" asked our hero, looking at him, while an uneasy glance shot from his eyes.

"What did you do with the chart of Jim Mitchell's mine?"

"Et has it. I gave it to her to keep, because she said she could pin it in the pocket of her riding skirt."

"Well, it must be all right, then. I thought that you had placed it somewhere, and that some one had been spying when you did it."

"Well, we don't know whether it is all right or not. Let us get back there and see."

The two had been speaking in low tones during this short conversation, and the expression of their faces showed that they were both alarmed when they arrived at the hotel stoop, where the rays of the big oil lamp that was fastened to a post could fall on them.

At that moment Anna and Eloise came running out in great alarm.

"Arietta can't be found anywhere!" they cried.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ARDUCTION OF ARIETTA.

The man who had shot at Cheyenne Charlie was no other than Bob, the proprietor of the Cloven Hoof.

He had seen Cherry after he was rigged out in his dandy outfit, and learning from the conceited little rascal that he was going over to North Boulder to pay a visit to the golden-haired girl, he resolved to go along and see the fun.

Five others belonging to Bruce Budd's gang concluded to go also.

Cherry sat as proud as a peacock on his horse as they left the yard of the saloon and crossed lots, so he would not be seen and hooted at on the streets.

"You fellers will be surprised to see me win that gal," he observed when they had reached the rather lonely road. "But you jest wait!"

"All right," chuckled Bob. "We'll wait. I hope I didn't leave my place in charge of my bartender to-night for nothin'. I'm jist waitin' to see somethin'."

"Maybe you think she won't have me?"

"I wouldn't say that. Why, you're ther best-dressed man in Boulder this night, an' I ain't sich a fool that I don't know that gals in general like well-dressed men."

Though Bob was piling it on pretty thick when he said this, Cherry did not take it that way.

"I reckon I ain't such a homely feller, if I ain't as large as ther majority," he went on. "That gal is a great deal more like to take to me after she sees me once, than she

is to that Young Wild West, who is only a boy with little or no brains."

"That's right," spoke up one of the other men, who was enjoying it as much as was the saloon man. "But jest tell us how you're goin' to introduce yourself to her."

"Love will find a way—it always does, I reckon," and he placed his hand over his heart and leaned back in a dramatic attitude.

"Well, I've heard a lot about this feelin' they call love," observed another, as he dug Bob in the ribs, "an' I reckon I'll git a chance to see what it is like afore we git back to-night."

"You might see what it is like, but you won't feel it," replied Charry, as he urged his horse to a faster gait. "You might even see me kiss ther golden-haired gal, but you won't feel ther kiss."

Then he laughed loudly, and the villains joined in with him.

As they neared the mining camp Cherry suddenly turned to them, and said:

"Boys, you know what ther rules are when we are out, an' Bruce ain't with us?"

"I reckon we know ther rules all right," answered Bob, though he did not know exactly what the little man was driving at.

"Well, I thought I'd jog your minds a little bit, that's all. I'm in charge now, an' what I tells you all to do you've got to do. I may take it in my head to take ther golden-haired gal away with us, you know."

"That would be a foolish thing to do, I reckon," one of them ventured.

"That's what you think, maybe. But who is supposed to have ther most brains at schemin' things in our gang?"

"You!" exclaimed Bob, speaking truthfully.

"An' haven't you all swore to do as I say when you are out with me?"

"Yes."

"Well, then you are goin' to do what I ask you to do to-night. If you don't want to do it, you had better ride back to ther Cloven Hoof, an' have done with it."

The six villains looked at one another.

They knew that according to the rules of their organization, they were in duty bound to obey the commands of the lieutenant when the captain was not with them.

But they did not feel like doing anything against Young Wild West that night, since they had heard Budd say that they were to hunt for the hidden gold mine on the morrow.

They thought the little man might get it into his head to do something reckless on account of his infatuation for the golden-haired girl, and they did not like it.

Still they concluded to stick by him.

As they rode up the single street of the mining camp they heard the strains of a violin.

They came to a halt for a moment and listened.

"It comes from ther Nugget Hotel," said Cherry, suddenly. "See what a crowd there is around their building!"



"There's a dance goin' on, I reckon," spoke up the saloon-keeper. "I kin hear ther sounds of feet jumpin' on a bare floor."

"That's ther place where Young Wild West an' his gal hangs out," resumed Cherry. "Come on. We'll ride around to ther little strip of woods that runs up close to ther back of ther place. That's where I sneaked off this afternoon when I had been listenin' to what they was talkin' about ther chart Jim Mitchell give 'em afore he died. You foller me, now, an' we'll git right there without any one seein' us come."

Through the darkness the seven forms rode like so many shadows.

In a couple of minutes they had passed through the strip of woods and around to the rear of the hotel.

Dismounting, they tied their horses, and then brushing his new clothes to relieve them of the dust that might have accumulated during the ride over from the town, Cherry led the way around to the front.

They got into the barroom, without being noticed in particular by the crowd, just as the music ceased.

Then, after taking a drink, Cherry went into the room where our friends were.

What happened there has already been told.

When the little fellow came flying through the window, Bob was right there and saw the whole thing.

The villain had no particular love for the scout, since he had thrown the same one over his bar that day, and as quick as a flash he drew his revolver and fired at him.

Without waiting to see whether the bullet had hit the mark or not, he stooped and grabbed Cherry by the collar, and dragged him away.

That action saved him from being found out as the fellow who had fired the shot, for though many had seen the flash, no one had seen exactly who fired it.

The little dandy was hustled around to the back of the building in no time.

The whole seven of them were soon beside their horses. Then, for the first time, Cherry spoke.

"Boys," said he, in a hoarse whisper, which sounded out of place with him, "I ain't mad a bit. While you was draggin' me along I thought of a great scheme."

"Well, we ain't got no time to listen to it now," interrupted Bob. "They'll be after us afore you kin say Jack Robinson!"

"Oh, no, they won't! If they'd been goin' to chase us they'd have been here by this time. Jest stay right where you are, every one of you! I'm in command, I reckon."

There was no reply to this, but none of the villains offered to mount.

They knew the little man was a great favorite with Bruce Budd, and probably that was why they gave in to him.

"Each second we stay here we're losin' time," went on Cherry. "Now, four of you ride on over to ther clump of oaks over there, an' start in shootin' and yellin', jist as

you an' you," pointing to the man nearest to him, "will stay here with me for a few minutes."

Without any questioning the four mounted and rode off, acting very much as though they were glad of the opportunity.

"Remember what I told you to do," was the parting injunction Cherry gave them.

Then the little man and his two companions stood there waiting.

"What are you up to, anyway, Cherry?" Bob ventured to ask, a few seconds later.

"I'm goin' to git ther golden-haired gal an' take her over to your place, Bob," was the whispered rejoinder. "It struck me jest now that it would be a good thing to do, anyhow, as Young Wild West would certainly be glad to give up that gold mine of Mitchell's to git her back wouldn't he?"

This struck the saloon-keeper as being very sound logic.

He did not stop to think that Cherry, in his desire to get hold of the girl, might be using the proposition to gain the approval of the other man and himself.

Just then the four men began to get in their part of the work.

They did some very fast shooting, and their yells rang out so loudly that it sounded as though there were more than four of them.

At the first shot Cherry told the two villains to follow him.

Straight for the side window of the room where the dancing had been in progress, he made.

Luck was with the scheming little scoundrel, it seemed, for he had no sooner reached the window and was raising to peer into the room, when the figure of a female approached it and leaned out.

Cherry's heart gave a bound.

There was light enough for him to see the face of the girl who had slapped him in the face.

It was Arietta, sure enough.

She had come to the window to see if she sould catch a glimpse of Wild and the rest.

She leaned away out when she heard the crowd running away from the building, and wondered what was up.

The next instant an arm was thrust around her body and a hand pressed tightly over her mouth.

Then another pair of hands seized her, and she was lifted out of the window with scarcely the least bit of noise.

The thing was done neatly and quickly, but it was more to the credit of good luck than good judgment on the part of Cherry.

It had worked jist his way, for neither Anna nor Eloise saw her go out of the window.

Badly frightened and struggling vainly to get out of the clutches of the villains, Arietta was carried off into the darkness.

A couple of coarse handkerchiefs sufficed to both the her



Then Cherry got on his horse, and she was handed up to him.

That was the proudest moment of the little villain's life.

"Now, then, my golden-haired beauty!" he exclaimed, as he rode off in a round-about way to the road that led to the town. "I guess you'll learn to think better of me, an' not slap me, like you did a little while ago. You are goin' to be ther bride of ther gallant Cherry!"

At this the girl made a violent effort to free herself.

If she could have succeeded in doing so, it would have gone hard with her captor, no doubt, for Arietta was a girl who always carried a small silver-mounted revolver when she was away from home.

She had it with her now, too, it being thrust in the bosom of her doeskin hunting dress, which she had been wearing that day.

And Arietta knew how to use the weapon, too!

Woe to Cherry if she but got her hands free!

The girl was really more angered than frightened when she learned who her captor was, but as they rode along at a sharp clip and gradually left the mining camp behind them, she became more cool.

Cherry did not have anything further to say when he saw the effect his words had upon his fair captive.

He was afraid she might struggle sufficiently to get off the horse.

Then one of the others would want to carry her, and he did not want that.

No! The golden-haired girl was his prisoner, and all he had to do now was to gain her consent to an early marriage.

He had not the least idea of giving her back to Young Wild West, even if the boy agreed to turn the gold mine over to them in exchange.

Arietta's pretty face had completely turned his head.

"Ride ahead, Bob!" the little schemer said, when they began to near the town. "We don't want to meet any one, you know."

"Well, why not turn off from ther road an' make for the back yard of ther Cloven Hoof now?" came the retort.

"Good! That's ther fust time I ever heard you make a good suggestion."

Cherry was so elated at what he had accomplished, that he did not care what he said to the men.

But that remark did not make Bob feel any friendlier toward him.

It made him completely mad with him, in fact.

A few minutes later the party rode into the back yard, and dismounted.

Then Arietta was carried into the house, and locked in a small room.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CHERRY'S TRIUMPH IS SHORT-LIVED.

"What!" gasped Young Wild West, when he had heard Anna say that Arietta could not be found anywhere.

Eloise shook her head, showing how frightened and alarmed she was.

"We missed her nearly ten minutes ago," said Cheyenne Charlie's wife. "She may have been gone longer, too, for we thought she had gone outside to see the result of the row that started. When we found that she did not come back we went to look for her. But she was not there, so we came in and asked Mrs. Lynch if she had seen her anywhere near the house. She said she had not, but we have been searching it all through, to make sure. I haven't the least idea what has become of her, unless she is hiding, just to play a trick on us."

"She has not done anything like that," retorted Wild, shaking his head. "Et wouldn't do that—it is not at all like her. She likes a joke well enough, but she wouldn't set us all to worrying for nothing. Where did you see her last?"

"She walked over to the window over there when you all started to leave the front of the hotel," spoke up Eloise. "Arietta went to that window and we came to this one here in front."

Wild hastened to the window.

But there was nothing there by which a trace of the missing girl could be found.

"Give me a lantern!" he cried.

Landlord Lynch soon brought him one.

Outside went the boy, and then around to the side of the house where the window was.

He had scarcely reached the spot when the rays of the lantern fell upon a bow of blue ribbon.

It was one that Arietta had worn that day, and no one recognized it any quicker than Young Wild West did.

He searched carefully over the ground then, but there was nothing there to show any further signs.

The ground happened to be hard and well packed there, so it was out of the question to think of finding footprints.

"Well, I have learned one thing, anyway," said the boy, speaking coolly, though he was greatly agitated, for all that. "She went out of that window when she left the house. She may have jumped out for the purpose of running around to the front and surprising Anna and Eloise, but if she intended to do that, some one interfered with her before she got there."

"Then you think some one has abducted her, then?" spoke up Jim.

"Yes; I must say that is the way it looks to me."

"Who could it be?"

"Who but the little fool who said he was in love with her? He may have had it all arranged, for aught we know. I now can understand why it was that we found no traces of the men who were doing the firing and yelling up here a ways. That was when Et disappeared, I'll wager!"

"What are you going to do about it, Wild?" Cheyenne Charlie asked, anxiously.

"I am going straight to the Cloven Hoof saloon," was the quick retort.



"That's it!" exclaimed Jim. "That's where that little fellow called Cherry hangs out."

"Well, I reckon if I find out it was him what was at ther bottom of this I'll wring his neck," remarked Charlie.

Wild promptly sent for their horses to be brought from the stable.

More than fifty men volunteered to go with them when they learned that one of the girls of the party was supposed to have been kidnapped.

"I thank you for the offer, boys," replied our hero, addressing them; "but I have an idea that it will require some strategy to find my missing sweetheart. Myself and partners are going to town, and about a dozen of you can go along, if you desire, providing you will agree to do just as I say."

"We will!"

"Good enough!"

"We'll riddle ther skunks what done it!"

"Let me be one to go, won't yer?"

These and many more replies came to Wild's remarks.

But he thought it unwise to take more than a dozen with him, so he left it to Charlie to select them, while he went to Anna and Eloise and again questioned them as to when they had last seen Arietta.

But they could tell him nothing more than they had at first, so the theory he himself had advanced was the only one he had to work on.

A few minutes later he was riding out of the mining camp of North Boulder with fourteen men behind him.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart were two of them, of course, and the others were trusted fellows, who would as soon fight as eat.

They rode at a swift pace, and when the lights of the town came in sight, Wild called them to a halt.

"Now, then," said he, acting as coolly as though he was merely at the head of a party who were going to give a surprise to some friend, "I would like you all to ride into town in ones and twos. I have an idea that the people who hang out at the Cloven Hoof did this thing. I want one of you to go in that saloon and find out if the little chap called Cherry is there. Who will it be?"

"Me, Mr. West!" exclaimed Shadow, who was one of the party.

"All right. You can do it. When you have found out you can come out and meet me in the rear of the saloon. The rest of you, except Charlie and Jim, who will stay with me, can remain within the sound of a pistol shot of the saloon. When you hear two quick shots you will know that I want you, either because I need you to help fight, or that I have found Miss Murdock, and am ready to start for home. Do you understand?"

"We do," came the answer.

"All right, then. Now, don't any of you go into a place and say a word about there being a girl missing from the camp. The least thing might spoil it all, as, if these fellows are the ones who stole her, they are liable to have friends about, waiting to hear if there is anybody looking

for her. Now, then, away to your duties, boys, and when we find my sweetheart and get safely back to the Nugget Hotel, I'll tell you how I am going to reward you for helping me to-night."

A subdued cheer came from the men at this.

Then they scattered and rode off to do exactly as they had been directed.

Wild and his two partners rode behind the saloon across the vacant lot that adjoined it.

There was nothing strange about this, as there was a regular path there, so those who saw them go that way from the street could but think that they were going to put up their horses in the shed.

Before he made another move our hero wanted to hear the report Shadow would make.

They dismounted and tied their horses among some trees well back from the shed and other outbuildings connected with the saloon.

Then they waited, Wild growing more anxious as the minutes flitted by.

It must have been a full quarter of an hour before they saw a man coming that way.

When he got a little nearer they could easily tell that it was Shadow.

His lanky form could not be mistaken.

"Well?" asked Wild, as he found them.

"Ther boss of ther saloon is there, an' so is Bruce Budd an' some of ther gang what travels with him," was the reply.

"And Cherry was not there, eh?"

"No; but I heard his squealin' voice, though."

"You did?"

"Yes. He must be upstairs in ther house. I heard him yell like anything, an' then a door slammed."

"Did those downstairs make a move when that happened?"

"Ther feller what runs ther place laughed, an' said to Bruce Budd that Cherry couldn't be gittin' along very smooth in his love affair."

"He did, eh? Well, that means that Miss Murdock is upstairs in that house, then!"

"That's jest what I think, Mr. West; but I thought I wouldn't say so till I had told you jest what I had found out."

"Well, I am going into the house right away, and I am going to try to get in without any one knowing it."

"I don't know how you will be able to do it, unless you go in by the back door."

"That will be dangerous work, Wild," said Jim. "Suppose Arietta is not there, after all, and you should be discovered in the place?"

"That will be all right about the discovering part. They are a set of villains who hang out there, and it would make no difference if they discover me. I won't let them get in the first shot. I guarantee. But I feel positive, now, that Et is there, and you know I would go through fire and water for her. I am going in that house."



"Well, we'll go with you, then," put in Charlie.

"You can, if you like."

"Certainly we will!" exclaimed Jim.

"Come on, then. Shadow, you will please stay here and look out for the horses."

"All right, Mr. West," answered the lanky man.

Wild now led the way to the rear of the house.

He felt that they had not a minute to spare.

There were two steps that led up to a back door, and he was trying the door almost before his companions were aware of it.

It was not locked, so he cautiously opened it and stepped inside.

Just as he did so the stifled cry of a female sounded right near him.

It was Arietta.

"Hello, Et!" Young Wild West whispered. "Is it you?"

"Wild!"

The next instant she was in the arms of her young lover.

The next minute the two were outside.

"Tell be all about it, little one," said our hero, as he led her back to where Shadow was watching the horses.

She did so, winding up by saying:

"I had not been locked in the room over half an hour or so when my adorer came to see me. He was still attired in his stylish rig, and he was smirking like a monkey-faced idiot when he came in, carrying a lantern.

"I had been in the dark all the time, you know, but, Wild, I wasn't so much afraid. I knew you would be able to find me easily, because you would naturally lay it to Cherry, and knowing that this was the place where he lives, you would surely come here to look for me.

"Well, my hands had not been untied yet, though the gag had slipped from my mouth, and when Cherry saw that he seemed much pleased.

"'You didn't yell for help, hey?' he said. 'Well, maybe you have concluded to be my bride without makin' any trouble?'

"'Won't you untie my hands?' I asked, not paying any attention to what he said.

"'Why, certainly,' the little fool answered, and then he did so. That was about ten minutes ago, or maybe less than that, and when I found my hands free I quickly pulled out my revolver and covered him.

"I made him hold up his hands till I looked around and found a heavy stick lying on the floor. I picked this up, while he looked at me in a dazed, simple manner. I was getting desperate, then, Wild, and I made up my mind that I was going to get out of that den.

"I raised the stick, and as I did so he yelled in fear. But that did not stop me, and I brought it down upon his head as hard as I could. I know I did not kill him, but he dropped to the floor senseless, just the same, and as he fell he struck the door and made it shut with a slam.

"Then I thought there would be more of the villains up after me, so I changed the stick to my left hand and the

revolver to my right and waited for a minute or two. I took the lantern he brought up and started to find my way downstairs.

"But I had not gone far when I heard men walking through the hall below. Where they went to I don't know, but it was some few minutes before I heard the last one go through. Then I came on downstairs, leaving the lantern at the top, and here I am."

"You did nobly, little one. There are lots of men who would not have done half so good. You are the bravest little girl that ever walked on prairie grass, and there's no mistake about it."

"Well, if I am brave, you have taught me to be," was the reply.

"That's right, Arietta," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "You ain't ther only one, either."

"There was never anything spoken that was any more true than that!" Jim Dart declared.

Then, turning to our hero, he added:

"What is ther next move, Wild?"

"We will go back to the hotel."

"You are not going to bother with Cherry any to-night, then?"

"No. I am so glad that Et is all right that we will let the little scoundrel and his friends be to-night. The time to punish them will come soon enough."

"Yes; it's bound to come," said Charlie, grimly.

"This has been the most exciting day we have put in for some time. We need rest, for we have got some work ahead of us to-morrow. Et, you will ride with me on the back of Spitfire. I hope you will enjoy the ride going back better than you did when you came."

"I think I shall," was the reply from the girl, who had now fully recovered herself and was as happy as a lark.

Shadow had been listening in wonder and admiration, and when Wild gave the word to mount, he exclaimed:

"By ther great boots! If Young Wild West is ther Boss Boy of Boulder, he's got a gal what's ther boss of ther universe! I'm glad that I've lived to meet sich people as you are!"

"That's all right, Shadow," laughed Wild. "There are plenty of people in the world who are as brave as we ever dared to be."

"Well, that might be true; but I've never come across any of 'em."

"Well, come on! We will go back to the Nugget Hotel now."

The next minute the four horses were crossing the open lot.

When they reached the street Wild fired two shots from his revolver in quick succession.

That was the signal agreed upon with the men, and in less than a minute they came from all directions.

"It is all right," said Young Wild West, when he found they were all there. "I found my sweetheart. We will wait till to-morrow, or some time later, to punish the villains who kidnapped her."



The two shots had attracted the attention of several on the street, but when they saw that it was only a party of friends the incident was soon forgotten.

Then the ride back to the mining camp of North Boulder began.

They reached there in due time, and then before they parted with the volunteers who had helped them out, Wild said:

"Gentlemen, we are now the owners of the hidden gold mine Jim Mitchell owned. We are going to open it tomorrow, and I would like to have you all help us. I promise you that you will all get a share of what is taken from it, whether it be little or much. There will be some fighting over the mine before we are through with it, as Bruce Budd is determined to get the gold he shot a man in the back for. Come around in the morning, and we will go over to this mine."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SPOT IS FOUND AND THE CAVE OPENED.

Our friends slept as soundly and peacefully that night as though nothing had happened out of the ordinary during the day.

The next morning at eight they had eaten breakfast, and were ready to go to the mine they expected to find.

Shadow and the rest of the men who had been with them the night before, came around, mounted on their horses, armed and equipped for business.

There had been just enough of a mystery about the man who had been slain to make them anxious to find out where the great vein of gold was that rumor said he had struck.

And now they were going to find it!

"Give me the chart, Et," said Wild, before they started. "We had better look at it again. I want to make sure of something before I head for the place."

He spread out the roughly made chart when Arietta handed it to him, and after carefully studying the direction, read the following again:

"Deep gully; nine feet to the right of where the brook flows underground is a big black rock. A crowbar will move this from mouth of cave. Rich vein of virgin gold here."

"I'll bet you knew all what you have read," said his sweetheart. "I have got the whole thing on my mind, and I think I could draw a chart that would be so near like this one that the place could be found from it, without so much as looking at this one again."

"Well, you have got a pretty good head on you, Et. No doubt you could do what you say, but you might make a mistake, you know. I just wanted to look at the paper so I would be sure of finding the place without referring to it in the presence of the men we are going to take with us. We will stake out a claim in the gully so as to take in the place where the brook flows underground, and that part where the cave is. Then we will all start in at digging, and the mouth of the cave will be found accidentally by

one of us; we will make it appear as though it was accidental."

"I see, Wild. You know just what you are doing. I could not make a suggestion if I wanted to."

Our hero soon told Charlie and Jim of what he proposed to do, and they thought it was the best way.

"Before we start in diggin', when we git to ther place," said the scout, "I want to say a few words to ther men. I'll tell 'em that Young Wild West's Million in Gold is supposed to be located on that spot somewhere, an' that they are there to help him find it; also, that I think there's more'n two millions there, an' what's over shall be divided. How will that do?"

"Couldn't be better, Charlie. I'll leave it to you. You might say, though, that if we don't find anything, and the thing has been a hoax, that they will be paid for all the time they have lost."

"That's it!" exclaimed Jim. "Don't let them think that they are losing their time for nothing."

"Well, I'll do that, then."

It now being all settled, they all came out of the house and mounted their horses.

The waiting twelve men took off their hats and gave a rousing cheer for the Boss Boy of Boulder and his plucky sweetheart, who was not afraid of all the cowboys in creation!

The nickname Shadow had given Young Wild West was liable to stick to him as long as he remained in Boulder County, it seemed.

It appeared to be a fitting appellation, and sounded all right to those who knew him.

When the party struck out for the point marked down on the chart Wild and his partners were keeping a sharp lookout for some signs of Bruce Budd and his gang.

He knew they would be watching his movements as a cat watches a mouse.

Wild did not care if they followed them and found where the lode was located; he could not keep that a secret from any one very long.

The reason Jim Mitchell had kept it a secret was because he never worked it, but simply took out enough gold at odd times to pay his expenses.

He had been a very eccentric man, anyhow, so those who had known him said.

As soon as he found the lode and got things in working order, Young Wild West intended to give the villainous outlaws a turn.

The kidnapping of Arietta must not go unpunished, even if she was a prisoner but a short time.

Such doings would not be tolerated by the good citizens of Boulder, anyway, and had they known what had happened they would have torn down the Cloven Hoof saloon in short order, and probably shot or hung Cherry and the men who assisted him in the daring steal.

But Wild was in no particular hurry.

Bruce Budd was a marked man, anyway, and as soon as



the young Prince of the Saddle said the word a hundred men would be on the track of the murderer.

All was needed was a little eloquence on the good points of the man who had been shot, and the crowd would be stirred.

Wild and Arietta rode along at the head of the column just as though they knew perfectly where they were going.

And the truth was that they were not confident that they would find any such place at all.

We say not confident, but that can hardly express it, for while they believed what the dying miner had said, they thought that it was possible that he had overestimated the value of the lode.

The distance was not far from the mining camp, according to the chart, and they soon came to a gully that Wild thought must be the right one.

He called a halt here, and then dismounting he ascended to a high point of rock and took a survey of the land.

"This is the spot, he thought. "Right down this gully we will find the place where the brook goes underground. Now for the million in gold!"

He was just going to descend to where the party awaited him when he suddenly caught sight of a man as he crept around an angle of rock a few yards away.

"Ah!" he muttered, "so they are here, are they? Well, they had better be mighty careful how they act. I have bullets waiting for some of the scoundrels in Bruce Budd's gang!"

"We will proceed down this gully a little ways," he said, when he got down to the level below. "We have found the spot all right!"

Not a word did he say of the man he had seen to any one but Charlie and Jim.

Down the gully they rode two abreast.

When perhaps a hundred yards had been traversed they came to a brook that trickled from the rocks above and ran along through the center of the gully.

Following the stream they soon came to a spot where it shifted from the middle of the gully and flowed underground through an opening that looked like the mouth of a small cave.

Our six friends made a quick survey of the place, and then they looked at each other.

The spot tallied exactly with the description given on the chart.

There was the big black rock just about three yards from the place where the stream lost itself underground.

The gully widened into a sort of basin right here, and off to the right was a level stretch of a hundred yards or more.

The big black rock was at the bottom of a short descent that projected out about twenty feet from the face of a hill.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Young Wild West. "Now, then, strike in at prospecting, and let's see who finds the

The men lost no time in dismounting and getting ready for business.

They had picks and shovels and pans with them, and knowing that Jim Mitchell had struck it rich, and that if this was really the spot, there must be lots of nuggets to be found, they struck in with a will.

The ladies entered into the spirit of the thing, too, and for the next two hours it was more like a search for something that had been lost than anything else.

But at the end of that time not ten cents' worth of gold had been found.

Then it was that Cheyenne Charlie called up the men and gave them the little speech he had been fixing up in his mind all the morning.

When he had told them all he had to say they seemed to be pleased.

"Boys," said Shadow, stepping out and taking off his hat, "if there's a million in gold anywhere around here, there's sartinly more!"

"That's right!" came the answer.

"But we ain't found it yet."

"No."

"An' if we don't find it, we git paid for our time, anyway."

"That's what he said."

"An' if we do find it, we git a whole lot more."

"That's it."

"Well, we can't lose either way; then, kin we?"

"No."

"Then hooray for ther Boss Boy of Boulder, I say!"

When the cheering had subsided Wild stepped out before the men.

"Boys," began he, "don't get discouraged because you haven't found anything yet. The gold is here, or else a dying man told us an untruth without there being a cause for him to do it. You all know that such is not apt to happen. When a man knows his last hour on earth has arrived, what he says of his own free will is apt to be the truth. Jim Mitchell, with his dying breath, told us that right here there was a hidden lode that would pan out millions in a very short time. Now, then, I am going to stay here for a while. I want you all to stop prospecting now, and get to work at cutting down some of the pines around here. I am going to build a sort of log shed right here over this black rock, so we can stow our tools and supplies in it. At least ten of us must stay here all the time, for Bruce Budd and his gang are after this lode, as well as we are. The only difference is that they want to take it by force, while we want it because Jim Mitchell gave it to us. Jump in lively, now, and cut down some of the trees."

They had axes with them, and not waiting a minute, the men got at work.

The trees were felled and turned into logs in short order, and then Wild superintended the building of a shed.

They worked till noon without rest, and then after they



from the mining camp, they got in and finished the job.

Wild wanted the shed built for two purposes.

It would protect them in case they were attacked by the outlaws, and it would cover the black stone, so he could work at it and turn it over at the same time.

He did not intend to keep the finding of the gold from the men, but he thought it best that it should be found by him and his companions.

If any of the men were by when the cave was opened they would certainly claim an equal share of what was in it.

It was about four in the afternoon, when the men had resumed prospecting in the gully, and no one was near the shed but his two partners and the girls.

The latter, tired from their search for nuggets, were seated on the ground, at the mouth of the shed, sorting out the wild flowers they had gathered.

Young Wild West caught the eyes of Charlie and Jim, and then picking up a crowbar, he walked under the shed to the big black rock.

He felt the rock carefully over with his hand, while his partners waited with breathless interest.

The next minute he found a place where the end of the bar would go in, and then he placed it there and gave a quick twist.

What had appeared to be a big black rock was only a slab of a few inches in thickness, and it fell over and dropped to the ground with a light thud that could not be heard ten feet, hardly.

Then, sure enough, they beheld the mouth of a cave before them.

It was dark as pitch inside, so Wild knelt on the ground and struck a match.

Jim and Charlie crouched on either side of him, and then all three peered into the cave.

The sight that met them was a dazzling one.

One entire side of the cave had all the appearance of being composed of virgin gold!

## CHAPTER X.

### CHERRY IS WHIPPED IN PUBLIC.

"What do you think of that, boys?" Wild asked, as he turned to his partners.

"Gee!" gasped Cheyenne Charlie.

"That beats anything I ever saw!" ejaculated Jim Dart.

"Does look nice, don't it? Just call the girls."

Jim did so as soon as he could recover from his astonishment at the sudden sight.

Arietta led the way into the shed.

The next minute Wild had lighted a lantern and crept into the cave, and they all had a chance to see what the vein of virgin gold looked like.

The rays of the lantern fell upon it, and made it shine with a glow of fire.

And the glare was almost a blood red, too.

Gold in its natural state is not the color it assumes when

It is more of a dull reddish-yellow color.

But this vein was so full of the precious metal that it glowed and sparkled under the rays of the lantern like a smattering of diamonds embedded in a slab of rock.

For the space of half a minute the six looked at the extraordinary sight without saying a word.

Then Young Wild West broke the silence.

"I guess we will be able to get our Million in Gold out of that lode!" he exclaimed. "What do you all think of it, any way?"

"It is the greatest sight I ever laid eyes on!" said Anna.

Eloise shook her head, as though she could hardly believe what she saw.

"If it is gold," said she, "there must be more than a million dollars' worth there!"

"It is gold," spoke up Arietta, in a decisive tone. "I have seen it in smaller quantities, and I cannot be deceived. I can't understand why that man was foolish enough to leave all this."

"He certainly could not have been right in the head," answered Wild.

"Are you going to let the men have a look at this?" asked Jim, a few minutes later, when they had crept inside and broken off a few chunks of the gold.

"Certainly," was the reply. "There is enough here for all hands. If we get a million out of it we ought to be satisfied, and we can do that in a few days, by the looks of it. I shall go and call the men at once."

He was as good as his word, too, for stepping out from under the shed, he gave a whistle that could be heard far and near.

Then he fired a shot from his revolver.

That was enough.

The twelve men came running in from all directions.

They were somewhat alarmed at the sudden call, but when Young Wild West took up one of the larger lumps of gold that had been knocked from the interior of the cave and held it up in his hands, they knew why they had been called.

"Boys," said he, "I have found the million in gold! Come, and I will show it to you."

With exclamations of delight and amazement, the men surged for the shed.

"You can't all see it at one time, as the place where it is won't hold over half a dozen at a time. Now, then, take it easy. The stuff is here all right."

Then he showed them, three or four at a time, the interior of the cave.

As nearly all of them had been working in hard luck for a long time, the sight was like a vision of the Arabian Nights to them.

"There's more stuff in that pocket than there is in all ther mines in ther camp put together!" cried Shadow, with distended eyes.

"That ain't a pocket; that's a lode," corrected one of the men, throwing his hat in the air. "Boys, I reckon we



West. As Shadder says, he's ther Boss Boy of Boulder, an' he's got his Million in Gold right in his clutches. Hooray for everybody, I say!"

While the men were cheering themselves hoarse a crackling noise sounded from a tree above them, and down came a diminutive form, right in their midst.

For an instant a hush came over all hands, for that which had happened so unexpectedly was startling.

Pretty Arietta Murdock was the first to find the use of her tongue.

"It's Cherry, or I'll never speak another word!" she cried.

Then all hands saw that she had spoken the truth.

The little villain had been in the tree listening to all that was said below him.

The limb he was clinging to had broken and let him down right among his enemies.

Cheyenne Charlie leaped forward with the quickness of a cat.

"You little imp!" he exclaimed, seizing the villain by the collar. "I said ther next time I got hold of you I was goin' to shake you. Now here goes!"

The scout had both hands on him now, and the way he shook the little villain was startling, indeed.

"Take his weapons from him and tie him up," said Wild quietly.

Willing hands soon did this, and a few minutes later Cherry was securely bound to a tree.

"When you get so you can talk just let me know," said Young Wild West. "You are about the most insignificant specimen of mankind I ever met, and I want you to bear in mind that unless you answer me truthfully I will shoot off the top of your head!"

Charlie and Jim were watching out for a sign of the rascal's friends.

But though they looked carefully above on either side, they did not catch a glimpse of a man.

Pretty soon Cherry started to speak.

"Have mercy on me!" was the first thing intelligible to come from his lips.

"Now, then, what were you doing up in that tree?" Young Wild West asked, sternly.

"I jist climbed up it to see what was goin' on down here," was the trembling reply."

"Well, what did you learn by climbing into the tree?"

"I learned that it would be best not to do it ag'in, even if I got ther chance," replied the wretch.

"Where is Bruce Budd?"

"In town, I guess."

"You only guess that. Are you sure he is not around here, pretty close by."

"I ain't sure."

"I thought not. Now, tell me how many men are with him?"

"There's nine of 'em, altogether."

"And they want to get hold of the mine that belonged to the man Bruce Budd killed?"

"I reckon they'd like to," was the meek reply.

"Well, they never will, for if they don't leave this vicinity inside of twenty-four hours I will lead a band of men that will hunt them till there is not one of them left living. Do you hear what I say?"

"Yes; I hear you. But say! You ain't got no right to hunt them fellers. They ain't done nothin' to you."

"You haven't done anything, either, have you?"

"Well, you've got me, ain't you?"

"Yes; we have got you," he said, after a pause. "And I must say that I hardly know what to do with you, as I am not the sort to take the life of a prisoner."

At this the eyes of Cherry lighted up with a glow of hope.

"Let me go, won't you?" he asked, pleadingly.

"I will make terms with him, Wild!" exclaimed Arietta, stepping up. "Let me, please."

"Why, what terms do you want to make with him, Et?" was the question our hero asked of his sweetheart.

"Well, let him agree to fight a duel with me, with whips for weapons. I feel like thrashing him till he can't stand."

Our three friends broke into a laugh at this, and the twelve men joined them.

The proposition was a novel one, and after a moment's thought Young Wild West told Et to go ahead and have it as she wanted it.

"All right," said the girl, with flashing eyes. "Charlie, just cut two stout whips, will you?"

"You bet I will!" was the reply, and there being plenty growing about he soon had them.

"Now, untie the little wretch!" said Arietta.

"Do you understand this?" Wild asked him. "The golden-haired girl you fell in love with yesterday is going to fight a duel with you. When it is fought and won you are to make tracks from here as fast as your legs will carry you."

"I understand," and then Cherry shrugged his shoulders as Charlie handed him one of the whips.

Then Arietta stepped up to administer the punishment that he was so deserving of.

"I can't hit you back!" cried the little wretch, his eyes lighting up when he looked upon the charming picture the angered girl made. "I can't hit sich a beauty as you, indeed I——"

That seemed to be the signal for the curious duel to begin, for Arietta brought her whip down upon his shoulder with such force that he uttered a groan, and started to run away.

But the men quickly hustled him back, and then he stood there vainly endeavoring to shield himself from the blows that were showered upon him.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Arietta laid on the whip with the ease and accuracy of an old-time schoolmarm.

And as though it were really a boy getting whipped in school, Cherry began to bellow like a big calf, but never once striking back at the girl.



Finally he sank to the ground, groaning with pain.

Then she ceased, and throwing away the whip, walked to the shed.

Just then half a dozen rifle shots rang out, and one of the men dropped with a bullet in his arm!

## CHAPTER XI.

### CONCLUSION.

The attack upon our friends was so unexpected that they were at a loss as to where the shots had been fired from at first.

"Get to cover boys!" cried Young Wild West. "Bruce Budd has opened his game, and now we will play it with him to the finish!"

Just then he caught sight of a puff of smoke from a craggy projection off to the left.

A report sounded almost at the same time, and the bullet buried itself in one of the logs the shed had been constructed of.

But Young Wild West's eagle eyes saw something else beside the puff of smoke.

It was a portion of the body of the man who had fired the shot.

Crack!

The boy's rifle spoke, and then all hands saw a man come tumbling down from the crag, and fall with a splash into the brook below.

"A wonderful shot!" exclaimed Shadow, who was trying his best to catch sight of one of the villains who were attacking them from cover.

Cherry now came crawling into their midst.

He evidently thought it was best to remain with his enemies just then.

"I thought you was told to git out?" Cheyenne Charlie said.

"I'm afraid I might git shot by mistake," was the reply. "Won't you let me stay here till ther fightin' is over?"

"He wants to be the first one at the gold mine when we are beaten and done for," spoke up Jim, with a laugh.

But the little man kept right on crawling for cover, not heeding what was said.

He never stopped till he got inside the cave of gold.

"Let him stay in there and have a look at what is there," remarked Wild. "That is all the good it will do him."

"Humph!" grunted Cheyenne Charlie, "ther little coyote is ther worst one of ther lot, I think. If I was you, Wild, I'd send him over to them fellers to tell 'em that if they don't quit shootin' we'll make mince-meat of 'em."

Our hero thought a while, and then came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to do this.

"Come out here, Cherry!" he called, kneeling before the mouth of the cave.

In something like a minute the little rascal came creeping out.

"What is it, sir?" he asked, meekly.

"I want you to go over to those friends of yours right away. Tell Bruce Budd that unless he withdraws his men

inside of ten minutes and lets us alone, we will come up there and put the finishing touch to the whole lot of them."

"Yes, sir."

"You may tell him anything else you like, but don't forget to tell him what I said."

"I won't sir."

"Then be off with you at once."

"Kin I git my hat an' boots first?"

"Yes; but hurry up."

"They won't shoot me; do you think they will?"

"A good thing if they did," muttered Charlie.

Since losing one of their men the hiding gang had been strangely quiet, and when Cherry sneaked out and picked up his boots and put them on, none of them ventured to show themselves.

When the wretch got his boots on and had picked up his hat, he at once started down the gully for a slope where he could ascend to the point where his friends were.

Wild and his companions watched him with interest.

Pretty soon he disappeared.

"He will be back again, see if he don't," said the Young Prince of the Saddle a minute later.

After a while he came to the conclusion that it would not be a bad idea to get to work at the lode in the cave.

He picked out three men and sent them inside with Jim Dart to superintend them.

"Try and find out how thick the layer is," he said.

The sound of the picks was soon heard, the men working away like beavers.

It lacked but little more than an hour from sunset, and Young Wild West began to figure as to what was the best thing to be done.

"If the girls were only safe," he thought, "it would be easy enough. Well, the chances are that we will have to remain here all night, so the only thing to do is to fix up a camp, I guess."

He took the risk of walking out of the shed after he had made a survey of the surrounding country, without seeing anything of the outlaw gang.

But they were not far away, for presently he saw Cherry coming back, as he expected he would.

The little man carried a flag of truce this time, showing that he was not quite satisfied that Young Wild West's party would not shoot him for showing up again.

Wild walked out to meet him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Captain Bruce sent me to tell you that he was goin' to quit an' leave you people be," was the answer. "He says if you'll let everything drop what's between you an' him he'll never bother you ag'in."

"All right. Tell him I will agree to that, providing he makes himself scarce. If he stays around this section he will surely wind up with a rope around his neck. I couldn't stop that, and I wouldn't if I could."

"He says he's goin' to lay low for a while."

"Well, you had better lay low for a while, too. The next time I catch you in any villainy up you will go!"



"All right, Mr. West. We are goin' to start for town right away, so you needn't expect to be bothered by Bruce Budd's gang any more."

Cherry turned and walked swiftly back.

Wild watched him till he was out of sight, and after marking in his mind the spot where he disappeared, he went back to the log shed.

"Well, how did you make out with ther little coyote?" the scout asked.

Wild told them just what had been said.

"Do you believe that?" Jim queried.

"Not a word of it."

"What do you propose to do, then?"

"In half an hour from now I will take six men with me and go and attend to them. Bruce Budd and his villains will be waiting for us, I am sure. Then there will be a fight, and the matter will be settled."

Arietta, who heard this, stepped forward, her face paling.

"If they ambush you, Wild, you may fall by a bullet, with no chance to fight," she said, anxiously.

"Oh, no! I am going now to find out where they go to ambush us."

Then he turned to Jim Dart, and added:

"You will stay here with the girls and the gold. Charlie will select five men besides himself, and be ready to go with me when I come back. I will not be gone longer than twenty minutes."

Young Wild West suspected the spot that the villains had hide, if they really did mean to ambush them.

It was at the mouth of the gully.

Knowing that the outlaws had left the place where they had been in hiding, either to go to the town or to wait in ambush, he had no fears of being seen by them.

So, without any further instructions, he set out.

Wild walked rapidly, and in five minutes he was close to the spot where he thought they might be.

Then he began climbing up the side of the gully.

In ve minutes more he had reached a place where he could see clear to the mouth of the gully.

And he had no sooner looked in that direction than he gave a nod of satisfaction.

There were the villains, sure enough, crouching behind a clump of rocks, taking things easy, apparently.

Young Wild West did not wait more than a minute.

Then he made his way down into the gully and hurried back to his friends.

Charlie was waiting for him with the men he had selected.

"How about it?" he questioned.

"It is all right," was the reply. "They are behind a clump of rocks, near the mouth of the gully, waiting for us. Come on!"

"Mounted or afoot?"

"On foot. We will have to do a little climbing, as we want to take them by surprise."

scout, and he was delighted at being allowed to accompany them.

The seven hurried along till they reached the place where our hero had climbed up from the gully.

Then Wild led the way, admonishing them to be as noiseless as possible.

In a few minutes they were where they could all see the villains.

The gang seemed to be watching up the gully.

They were waiting for their victims to come along.

Bruce Budd had already killed one man in order to get hold of the gold mine, and he was now waiting to send some more to eternity.

The greed for gold was the predominating thought in him now.

The villains were talking in low tones as they watched and waited.

Wild wanted to hear what they were saying before he gave them the surprise he had in store for them.

He told the men to follow him, and then he began creeping down toward them.

In two minutes our friends were within twenty yards of them.

Then they stopped and listened.

"Oh! they'll be along putty soon," they heard the rascally little Cherry say. "Young Wild West believed what I said, I am sure."

"It might be that he didn't," Bruce Budd answered. "He's a putty sharp one, I reckon."

"But he ain't as sharp as me, though. Remember! I'm to git ther golden-haired gal for fixin' up this scheme."

"An' after you git her we'll all watch her give you another whippin'," laughed the rascally leader of the gang.

"No sich thing as tha' will occur. Do you know one thing?"

"What?"

"I didn't feel that whippin' ther gal gave me. She looked so handsome while she was doin' it that I couldn't think of ther blows I was gittin'. I'll tame her all right, an' I'll make her larn to love me afore two days. When she finds out what a head I've got on me she won't mind about me bein' undersized. It's brains that counts, every time, Bruce, it's brains, an' nothin' else."

Cheyenne Charlie raised his rifle as though to shoot the little scoundrel, but Young Wild West stopped him.

"Wait!" he whispered, "don't shoot the little fool, or any of the rest of them, unless they try to shoot us. Now for the surprise!"

He arose at that moment, and with leveled rifle started toward the men.

The others followed his example.

"Hello, there!" called out Wild, suddenly. "I thought you fellows had given up bothering us and gone to Boulder?"

If a bomb had exploded in their midst the villains could



"Give 'em fits, boys!" cried Bruce Budd, recovering himself quickly. "It's a fight to ther finish, now. Give it to 'em, an' remember that we are fightin' for a million in gold!"

He began firing before the words were fairly out of his mouth, and then a bullet from Cheyenne Charlie's rifle dropped him.

His followers did not run though, but fired a badly aimed volley.

That was all there was to it, for Wild did not try to stop the men, but let them make short work of the scoundrels.

In just three minutes it was all over.

All of them were dead or badly wounded.

Among the latter was Cherry.

He had received a bullet in the left knee, but instead of begging for his life he fought like a rat that had been cornered, and tried to plunge his knife into Cheyenne Charlie when he stepped up to him.

The scout kicked his weapon from his grasp, and then turning to Shadow and the other men, said, grimly:

"This is ther little coyote with ther big brain. He stole Young Wild West's sweetheart an' tried to make love to her, an' after we give him his life this afternoon, he lied to us an' tried to git us in a trap. Shootin' is too good for hm, boys!"

"I know what is wantin'!" spoke up Shadow, and then he darted toward the log shed as fast as his long legs could carry him.

"Come on, Jim," said Wild, quietly. "We are not wanted here."

They started back for the cave, and when half way there met Shadow running back with a lariat.

"Don't harm the other two who are wounded," cautioned Young Wild West. "We will take them to the camp with us."

"All right, Mr. West," was the answer, and then the thin man sped on.

A few minutes later Wild and the girls came riding through the gully on their way to the Nugget Hotel.

It was sunset, and our hero had arranged with Jim and the other men to stay there and guard the cave till the next morning.

As they rode out of the mouth of the gully they saw something swinging from the limb of a neighboring tree.

Neither Arietta, Anna or Eloise looked at it, but Wild did.

It was the body of Cherry. His last great scheme had been a fatal one, and he had simply met a just reward.

The next day our friends went to work at their lode of gold with a will.

At the end of the week it had all been taken out, and when Young Wild West figured it out he found that after giving a third of what was there to the twelve selected men, he lacked but a few ounces of having a million dollars' worth.

This was to be equally divided between the six.

it," said Arietta. "Let me go in and make a search; there may be some more in the cave."

She had her way about it, and a few minutes later she came back with a look of triumph.

She had a four-pound nugget in her hand, which she had picked from the pile of dirt in the cave.

"Take it, Wild!" she exclaimed with a happy smile.

Her young lover did so.

"Here's the nugget that puts the finishing touch to the million," said Wild, holding out the lump in one hand and grasping Arietta's hand with the other. "Here's the girl who picked it up, boys!"

The men cheered frantically when they heard this.

They had been talking it over among themselves about making up what was lacking, and now that it had been found by the pretty sweetheart of the Boss Boy of Boulder, they were happy.

Young Wild West's coming to Boulder County, Colorado, had been the means of making them rich, and being honest fellows, they knew how to appreciate it.

He had also rid the vicinity of the villainous gang led by Bruce Budd, the man who had been such a terror to the community.

Our friends did not continue their trip any further just then.

The spot seemed to be an ideal one for Eloise, and she began to regain her health as if by magic.

As Bob, the proprietor of the Cloven Hoof saloon, in Boulder City, had been one of the gang who had gone under in the fight in the gully, his property was immediately put up for sale at auction by one of his relatives.

Wild went over and bought it, paying a rather big price.

"There won't be any whiskey sold on that spot again—not as long as I live, anyhow," he said to a number of friends that he had made in the town.

Then he went to a reputable agent and instructed him to turn the place into a fine store, and rent it out for what he could get for it.

That made the majority of the inhabitants think more than ever that he was the Boss Boy of Boulder.

But Young Wild West could not linger long in that part of the country.

There were stirring times ahead for him, as will be seen in the next number of "Wild West Weekly."

#### THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST RUNNING THE GAUNTLET; OR, THE PAWNEE CHIEF'S LAST SHOT," which will be the next number (37) of "Wild West Weekly."

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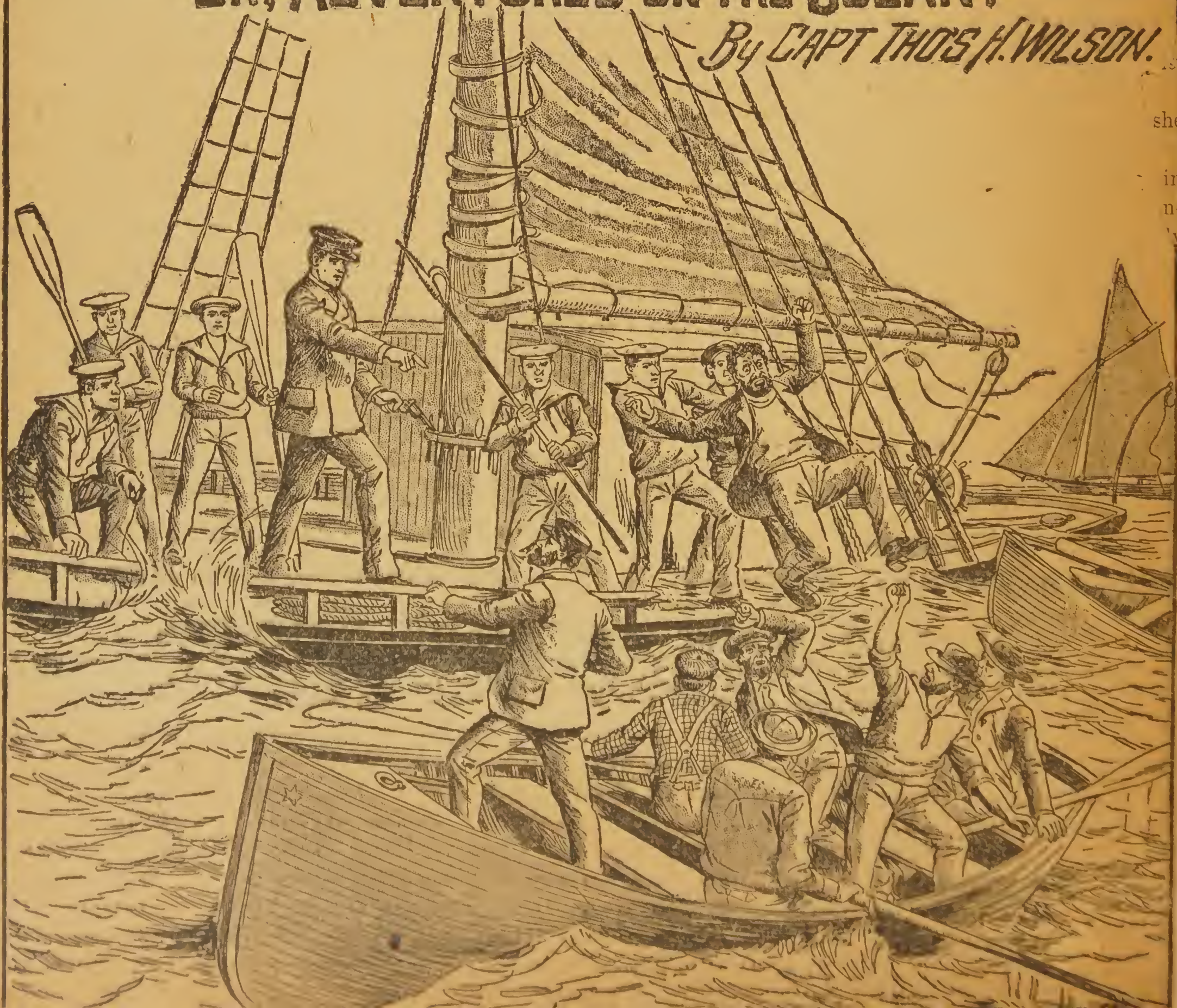
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